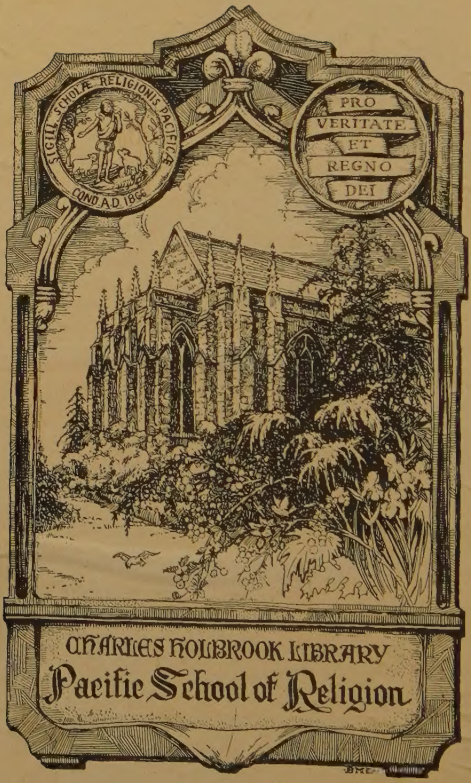
THE DAILY LIFE OF A RELIGIOUS

MOTHER FRANCIS RAPHAEL, O.S.D.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THE DAILY LIFE OF A RELIGIOUS

BY
MOTHER FRANCIS RAPHAEL, O.S.D.
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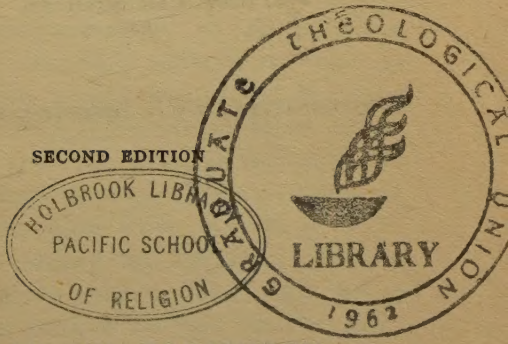
WITH PREFACE BY THE
VERY REV. FATHER JOHN PROCTER
Provincial of the English Dominicans



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PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

THE author of this little book needs no introduction to the English-reading Catholic world, nor do these pages call for many words of commendation. The author is well and gratefully remembered, and the present work will commend itself to all religious souls who are earnestly striving to walk, at however humble a distance, in the footsteps of the Saints, and especially of those Saints who once, as they do, lived in cloisters and followed a religious rule. The ten chapters which form this little *Vade Mecum* of a religious are in reality ten familiar, practical instructions given many years ago by a novice-mistress to her novices on the daily actions, the daily duties, the daily defects, the daily prayers, the daily difficulties, the daily helps and hindrances, the daily perfections and imperfections of the ordinary life of a religious; but, though they were intended emphatically for those who were going

through the process of spiritual and religious formation which is known in cloister language as the *Noviciate*, many others, no longer novices, but who have long "borne the burden and the heats of the day" and have grown old in the service of the Divine Master, will still learn from them lessons of grace and maxims of religious virtue.

The writer never for a moment anticipated that her simple, earnest words would be carried beyond the walls of the noviceship in which they were spoken, nor did she, either at the time or later, imagine that the manuscript in which they were preserved for the benefit of the religious family to which she belonged and over which for many years she presided as Superior, would ever be transferred to print and be given to the world in the present form. Many religious, however, men as well as women, proficients as well as novices, will, in now reading them, thank God that after her death others have decided differently and have had them published for the benefit of many living in Monasteries and Convents, following the same way of life, doing the same work, experiencing the same difficulties, though not professing the same Rule as they, the desire for whose spiritual advancement first prompted them.

Not only many in Convents, but some

pious souls in the world outside the cloister may derive benefit from these practical instructions. They were written, it is true, as a glance at the Index will reveal, for religious; but many who neither are nor intend to be monks or nuns, will be interested and edified by learning something of the *inner life* of the cloister to which they perhaps are not called. They will see beyond the walls of the Convent and beneath the habit which "does not make the monk" or nun; they will be enabled to study the kernel and not merely the shell—the motive which prompts the cloister-life, the spirit which quickens the religious vocation, the perfection which it implies, the helps—such as the daily Sacrifice, the daily Office, the habitual recollection—which safeguard it, as well as the difficulties and dangers to which they who embrace it are exposed.

Above all to those who wear the religious habit and profess the religious rule—no matter to what Order they may belong—this little book on their every-day life and its daily recurring duties—the outpouring of a zealous heart and a graceful pen—will prove to be a mine of spiritual wealth and a source of supernatural strength; it will be to them as "a beacon in darkness," as "a pillar of fire by night" and "a pillar of a cloud by day," to lead them safely and securely through

desert and sea to the land of rest when "the winter has passed" and the summer has come, when the toil is over and the work is done.

JOHN PROCTER, O.P.

St. Dominic's Priory,
London, N.W.

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THE DAILY LIFE OF A RELIGIOUS

CHAPTER I

ON THE PERFECTION OF ORDINARY ACTIONS IN GENERAL

MANY words are not necessary to prove that the essence of sanctity may be said to consist in the perfection of our ordinary actions. It is a maxim of ascetic theology that "perfection consists, not in doing extraordinary things, but in doing ordinary actions extraordinarily well." This spiritual axiom we will take as our first principle and try to develop by applying it to each of our daily duties in particular. Before doing so, however, let us give a few moments to the consideration of the subject in general, and see to what this well-doing of common actions may be reduced.

First, and of course foremost in importance, is the purity of intention with which they are performed. Every action may be said to have a body and a soul; the exterior act is the body

and the interior intention is the soul. And, just as the soul is of more worth than the body, so is the perfection of intention of more value in the sight of God than the material perfection of the external act. In some way or other, all our actions must be devoted to God, in order to have any merit at all in them. This is a certain truth; but to attain this purity of intention, it is by no means required to keep the mind always on the strain after high and sublime degrees of recollection. A religious who obeys any point of her rule, simply because it is her rule, is no doubt at that moment directing her action to God, even if she make no formal act of oblation to Him. Our rule is the expression of His Will; and the motive of obedience is always sufficient to sanctify an action and render it meritorious, however insignificant it may be in itself. There are nevertheless many ways by which the soul may gently and without fatigue attain to far more than this, and so grow into closer and more intimate union with God. Now union with God is the highest perfection of the soul, the end of all religious life; it is identical with the highest degrees of charity, and this union is to be sought for not so much in devotional exercises as in the purification of our ordinary acts. Thus St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi writes: "The surest way to draw God into the soul is to fly from the least imperfection," and St. John of the Cross repeatedly impresses on us this truth, that

we advance in contemplation, that is, in union with God, exactly in proportion as we mortify our passions.

We have said that the perfection of our ordinary actions is twofold, there must be, first, the intention directing what we do to God, and secondly, the well-doing of the action itself. Of the importance of the first it is hardly necessary to speak. To use the words of St. Gertrude, the offering of our intention to God renders the meanest action noble. It is the soul of the action, animating it with life and intelligence. Our Lord once appeared to this great Saint and said to her: "Gertrude, all thy actions have an inexpressible charm in My eyes." Confounded at such language, the Saint exclaimed: "O Lord, how can this be true of so vile a sinner?" And Our Lord replied: "If thou heldest in thy hands any object to which thou hadst the power of communicating a perfect beauty, wouldst thou not be willing to do it? Even so, by thy continual offering of thine actions to Me, they are, as it were, ever in My hands; and, having both the will and the power to make them perfect, I take a joy in doing so, and in purifying and beautifying them with My grace, till they acquire in My eyes a surpassing loveliness." Another time He said to her: "As all things beheld through a green glass seem green, so everything offered to God through the hands of His Divine Son appears coloured

by His merits and is infinitely pleasing in His eyes."

In the *Paradise of the Christian Soul* the same truth is illustrated by a different comparison. "Our least actions, if united to the actions of Christ, are clothed with the highest value and dignity. It is as though lead, by being cast into molten gold, were to acquire the beauty of gold; or as if a vessel of water, being poured into a cask of most choice wine, were to be mingled with and changed into the wine." And, not to multiply authorities and quotations, we have but to remember the admonition of the Apostle, to do all things, whether eating or drinking, to the glory of God, and again—"All, whatsoever you do in word or work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (*Col.* iii. 17).

But this offering of the action will not alone suffice to make it perfect unless after such oblation sincerely made we strive to perform the work as perfectly as we can. This well-doing of ordinary duties is the true test of our sincerity and purity of intention. There is a perpetual tendency in human nature to subtle hypocrisy. Even holy habits, so soon as they become habits tend to formalism. It is possible to make our oblation as a form, and a useful form, and then to set about the duty itself carelessly and admit a thousand wilful imperfections into our manner of doing it. If, before commencing

any manual work, for instance, we make our habitual oblation, and then at once give way to wandering thoughts or do what we are about in a slovenly, negligent, or murmuring spirit, or show our dissipation of mind by breaches of silence, or idleness, or impatience, it is difficult to say what influence our oblation has had in sanctifying these imperfect actions. Of course the involuntary distractions and imperfections which accompany our best actions do not interfere with the merit which is theirs in virtue of a sincere and pure intention made beforehand. What is here meant is that a mere formal intention will not be held to sanctify any action performed with wilful negligence. On this point we have a very striking anecdote in the life of St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, to whom the exercise of purity of intention was especially dear. Observing a novice once performing some duty in a very careless manner, she stopped her and said: "Daughter, for whom are you doing that action?" "For God," was the reply. "Then," said the Saint, "I assure you that I shall not fail to give you a severe penance. Had it been done for me or for any other creature, I would have pardoned its being ill-done; but, since you tell me that you do it for God, I marvel you should dare to offer Him anything so unworthy of His Divine Majesty."

The test of the purity of our intention then is the attention with which we do each action as

well as we can. This rule is already familiar to us: "Do all things well, because all things are done for God." To despise painstaking in the performance of common duties, taking refuge in the notion that we have made our intention beforehand, and that that suffices, is the hypocrisy of which we have spoken, the formalism of holy habits which have lost their sanctifying principle. We have reason to fear that such negligence may even contain a germ of secret pride which revolts against the necessity of taking pains to do common actions well, a pride whose reproof is in the Gospel, wherein we read of Our Divine Lord that, when men praised Him and His wonderful works, they did so by saying of Him: "He hath done all things well" (*St. Mark* vii. 37).

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST THOUGHT

ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA in one of his sermons says that God has given us three books, the book of nature, the book of Holy Scripture, and the book of conscience. The first is for the eyes, the second for the ears, and the third for the heart. Many lessons are taught in

all these books; and one which we read in all three of them concerns the first duty of our religious day.

If, at the moment before sunrise, you were to walk out on some green lawn and look around you, you would see grass and leaves and flowers all bathed in countless drops of dew. While the world sleeps, the dew-drops lie on the earth passively and at rest. But, as the sun rises and casts his beams on them, they disappear; and, if we ask whither they have gone, the answer is a simple one: the sun has drawn them to himself; they have risen up to heaven. Such is the lesson of the book of nature, and the language in which it teaches us to give our first waking thoughts to God.

The book of Scripture is not less clear in its teaching on this point. Not to speak of the morning sacrifice and the repeated allusions to early morning prayers throughout the Old Law, which was the figure of the New, there runs the ever recurring word, to offer to God the first fruits of all things, of corn, of wine, of oil; nay, the first fruits of our very offspring. And so we learn that of other things also God claims the first fruits, as He claims the consecration of the whole of our thoughts, our affections, and our time. In these things consists our life; and let the first of all these be given to God, that He may sanctify the remainder. Such is the teaching of the book of Scripture.

And our heart, our book of conscience, repeats the same lesson. Our very self-love, the surest exponent of mere natural feeling, is ready to own that it seeks the first place in the thoughts and memory of what it loves. It is jealous of anything else taking precedence; and this jealousy, which is sin in the creature, is the very perfection of God's love, who is solicitous that we should think of Him as "a jealous God" (*Exod.* xx. 5). He has revealed Himself as the "Alpha and Omega," the first and the last (*Apoc.* xxii. 13). He will have the best of what we have to give and the first share for Himself. In this way the voice of our own hearts, the book of conscience, bears witness to the truth of that which nature and Scripture have also taught.

The Saints have spoken and written many things regarding the value of our first waking moments and the duty of offering them as a morning sacrifice to God. Our Lord Himself once appeared to St. Mechtildis for the express purpose of teaching her the manner in which to offer Him her first morning sigh. Quicker than words, quicker even than the operation of thought, He claimed her first act of love by her waking respiration. "Let every one on awaking," He said, "sigh towards Me from the depths of his heart; and by that sigh let him beg of Me to accept and perfect all his acts during the day; and thus he will draw Me to

himself, and I will become the life of his soul, even as his soul is the life of his body." And to the same Saint He said another time: "I desire you to open your heart to My Heart when you open your eyes to the light and draw your first breath."

The instructions on the subject of rising and preparing for Office given in a Benedictine manual of devotions are framed in this spirit and are so beautiful that we cannot do better than quote them at length: "When the bell rings to call the community to rise for Matins, consider that it is rung by the angels who call you as they once called the shepherds on the mountains of Judea saying: 'Behold we bring you good tidings of great joy, come to adore your Spouse.' And, having risen in answer to their call, prostrate and kiss the ground as an acknowledgment of your own nothingness, and make a morning sacrifice of your entire self into the hands of God. Do this, however, briefly, and then endeavour to be the first to enter the choir in order to gain the special blessing which God and his angels are waiting to give you; for know that the guardian angel of the community waits at the door of the choir to bless the first who shall enter it for the praise of God. Dress, therefore, without delay and without vanity, observing only such rules of modesty as your rule enjoins. Make no lengthened devotions in your cell, but simply salute your crucifix and

go quickly to the place where your Spouse awaits you. You may, if you like, make a holy compact with one of your sisters that whichever is first in choir shall gain the merit of the other, these holy emulations in the service of God being a part of fraternal charity. As you pass through the dormitory on your way to the choir, entertain yourself with holy thoughts. Let nothing be lost by heedless dissipation. Let your exterior be modest, unaffected, composed, and recollected. The world and outward things as yet have no claim on you. You are all for God. Millions of angels are around you, watching your actions. Ask them to help you drive away the evil spirits from the cloister and the church, that nothing may impede the devotion with which you are about to sing the praises of your Lord. Entering the choir, bend down and kiss the ground, thereby expressing an act of self-annihilation and profound adoration; then form your morning intention according to your custom, and prepare to sing your Office as one who stands amidst an invisible choir of assisting angels."

You will see how identical is the spirit of these instructions with our own daily practice. The first thought to God, the prostration in our cell, the omission of long morning prayers in the cell in order to hasten to the choir, the benediction supposed to be gained by the one who first enters, the kissing of the ground in

token of adoration and self-annihilation, all these things are familiar to our minds. This familiarity proves that we possess what may be called the *machinery*, and are bound, if we be faithful, to possess also the *spirit* of contemplative life; since we too, like the children of St. Benedict, are taught to sanctify our exterior actions by the exercise of interior union with God.

With regard to the formal intention by which all our daily actions are in the morning made over and consecrated to God, each one may be guided by private devotion. The utility and virtue of such an offering is undoubtedly very great; and it will only be necessary to suggest (1) that a simple form should be preferred to those more lengthened and complicated ones to be found in some devout manuals; (2) that this intention should include the union of our actions with the actions and sufferings of Our Lord. It is this point which is so often insisted on by the Saints and which Bourgoigne describes as "clothing us in the very fleece of the Lamb of God." Hear Our Lord's own words to St. Gertrude. "My daughter," He said, "know that I will write in golden letters in the Book of Life all those works offered to Me in union with My Passion for God's glory and the salvation of souls. This is the tribute which I delight in exacting from My beloved ones; and I would have them offer it to Me

apart from all thought of gain to themselves."

The Saint, in consequence of these words, composed what she called a compact with God, so simple and beautiful that it may serve as a model for any similar exercise. She makes use of the Five Wounds as helps to her devotion and portions out her actions in their honour in the following way:—"O God, my Creator and my Lord, Thou knowest the desires of my heart, and my sighs are never hid from Thee. Yet, since the necessities of this life do not allow me to apply without interruption to Thy praises, let me make this compact with Thee once for all throughout the day.

"1. Each time I raise my eyes to heaven, I desire to rejoice with Thee for Thine infinite power, wisdom, goodness, and justice, and for all Thy infinite perfections.

"2. Each time I open or close my eyes, I would praise and take part in all the holy actions of Thy Divine Son and of all Thy Saints, and in all that ever has been or ever shall be done to Thy glory.

"3. Each time I draw a breath, I intend, O my God, to offer to Thee the Blood and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, with the merits and sufferings of all the Saints, for the salvation of all men, and in expiation of the sins of the entire world.

"4. Each time that I shall sigh, I intend to

detest and abhor all sins, both my own and those of all men from the beginning to the end of time.

"5. Each time that I move my hands and feet, I intend purely for the love of Thee to commend myself unreservedly to Thy Holy Will, that Thou mayest dispose of me according to Thy Divine good pleasure.

"And these five compacts I place under the seal of Thy Five most precious Wounds, that they may ever be in force, even when I think not of them, in virtue of this sacrifice which I make with my whole will and intention."

Another devotion of the same Saint was yet more simple. In honour of the Five Wounds she was accustomed to consecrate to God her five senses and to make the five following acts, viz., acts of adoration, thanksgiving, expiation for sin, impetration of grace, and an offering of all through the Passion of Christ; and with holy simplicity she associated this exercise with the movement of her five fingers, so that by an instantaneous movement she was able to realise these intentions on entering the choir.

"The value of these holy compacts," says Father Martin, the Carmelite, "may be gathered by considering what would be the effect of a contrary act. With what a load of guilt would that wretched man be charged who should profanely resolve that, each time he raised his eyes or moved his hand, he willed and

intended to take part in every act of sin which had been committed since the world began! Can that which would be of such terrific efficacy in the case of what is bad, fail to possess power and merit in its application to what is good?" Hence formal acts of this kind, varied in detail but the same in spirit, have ever been among the favourite morning devotions of the Saints, and, amongst others, of Saint Leonard of Port Maurice, who was accustomed to recall and renew his morning's intention by frequently during the day laying his hand on his breast or by repeating his favourite ejaculation, "My Jesus, mercy."

A few shorter practices and sayings of the Saints may here be added with regard to the act of rising and the morning oblation. Of the necessity of promptness in rising there is no need to add anything to what St. Vincent Ferrer teaches us in his little *Treatise on Religious Perfection*, that we should "rise as though our beds were on fire." An angel from heaven taught St. Mechtildis that she should feel joy in rising at the thought of the treasure of graces she might acquire during the day then beginning. The little prayers and ejaculations to be said on putting on each portion of the religious dress are full of the spirit of ancient devotion which has led the Church in like manner to prescribe prayers to her priests when putting on each of the sacred vestments. The habit of

a religious is the livery of Christ, the figure of that new man which he put on when he embraced this holy state; and to the kiss with which we salute it on first assuming it in the morning, it may be well to remind ourselves there is attached an indulgence. This kissing the habit, customary with all religious, was a point of particular devotion with some Saints, notably with St. John Berchmans, S.J.

Lastly, concerning the morning oblation already spoken of, we will add only what is related by Blosius, namely, that Our Lord revealed to St. Mechtildis that by the repeated and habitual oblations which St. Gertrude was accustomed to make of all her ordinary actions into His Hands, she had attained to such perfection that there was no place on earth, next to the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, where He dwelt in so intimate a manner as in her heart.

CHAPTER III

THE DAILY SACRIFICE

WERE it not for fear lest the words might seem to wear the semblance of disrespect to holy and spiritual souls, one would often be tempted to say that great mischief has been done by so much being said and written about "high methods of prayer." The mischief is, however, not so much in those who write as in those who read. What one desires is that beginners in the spiritual life should have a safe and infallible rule to show them (1) what is the highest prayer, and (2) what is the best prayer for them. Laying aside all those tempting delusions which present themselves to inexperienced souls when they read in the lives and writings of the Saints of some fresh and beautiful method of meditating, let us be content with the ordinary commonplace rule that to hear Mass devoutly must of necessity surpass every other prayer which any creature can offer to God. It is inconceivable how any system of meditation or any exercise of particular devotion whatsoever should commend itself to us in preference to the Adorable Sacrifice. Perhaps,

like so many of God's gifts, we value it less, simply on account of the profuse liberality wherewith it is given to us. It is possible that the Jews, who were able to offer their sacrifices only in one spot and many of whom were able to assist at those sacrifices only three times in the year, valued them more, attended more devoutly, and, we dare add, possibly gained more profit from those figurative sacrifices than we do, who assist daily at the priceless and Divine Sacrifice. In nothing is it more true than in Divine things that, with many of us, familiarity breeds contempt. Like the Israelites in the desert, we grow weary of the heavenly manna and treat it, even though we do not so call it, as "light food."

High methods of prayer! And what can be higher than daily to go up to Calvary? Sublime contemplations! And what should we desire to contemplate more sublime, more glorious, more Divine, than the Divine Victim Himself, immolated, manifested in the outward forms even before our bodily eyes for our adoration, for the homage of our whole heart and our whole being, when the little bell warns us that He has descended on the altar and stands before us at little more than an arm's length from us? Let this delusion have no place among us; let us measure things by God's standard, and prefer nothing of our own to that which is all Divine.

Were we to collect one hundredth part of the

wonderful things which holy writers have said about the dignity of this Sacrifice, we might speak of nothing else. "There is surely more water in the ocean," writes Father Le Blanc, "than in any of the streams which flow into it; more light in the sun than in any of the bodies which it illuminates; more warmth in a lighted furnace than in a painted fire. Even so, there is more of all graces in the Mass than in any other devotion, because in it is the Author of grace." The same writer, after relating many wonderful and beautiful stories of extraordinary graces granted in reward of extraordinary devotion shown in hearing Mass, goes on to say: "Nevertheless we will not attempt to imitate any of these things; we will only endeavour to hear Mass so as to please God and draw down on ourselves the graces which we need; and, in order to fulfil this duty in the most perfect manner, four very simple conditions are required: (1) purity of conscience, (2) a right intention, (3) earnest devotion, (4) humble petition."

Our Lord once said to St. Gertrude: "To him who is accustomed to hear Mass devoutly, I will send to help him in his last moments as many of My Saints as he has heard Masses with devotion." He also explained to her the proper way of assisting at each particular part of the Mass and the special graces attached to each, such as the *Agnus Dei*, the *Sanctus*, and the *Verbum caro factum est*; of which last He

said: "When a man genuflects at these words and gives thanks for My holy Incarnation, I in My turn bend towards him and offer to My Eternal Father all the merits of My Sacred Humanity to increase his eternal happiness."

A homely comparison, sufficiently expressive, however, has been made of the Holy Sacrifice to bread. As bread is at once the most general of all kinds of food, the commonest, the most wholesome, and the most necessary to man, so, in matters of devotion, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is that which is most universal and most necessary for the support of our spiritual life. And , just as a man may for a time prefer other rarer kinds of food and yet at length be forced to return to bread and own it to be the real staff of life, so is it with his spiritual taste and palate; he is forced to own that the common, ordinary devotion of hearing Mass well surpasses all other devotions; and, as it is the most common, so is it also the most essential and the most sublime. With deep significance may he say of the Divine Bread that it is at once his "daily bread" and "the bread of life."

A very beautiful story in the life of St. Gertrude illustrates the incomparable superiority of the devout hearing of Mass and receiving Holy Communion to any other kind of prayer, however perfect. It happened on one occasion that the Saint, having been engaged in certain distracting duties, conceived that it

would be better for her not to approach Holy Communion that day. During Mass, therefore, she strove to compensate for this privation by sublime exercises of love. She sought to enter as it were into the very Heart of her Beloved and to offer to Him the most excellent sacrifice of praise. She gave Him thanks for all graces conferred on all creatures, and she called on all the Saints to repair what was wanting in her by their more perfect homage and especially by presenting to God that degree of love with which they had appeared in His presence to receive their eternal crowns. Many other sublime and beautiful exercises did she offer; but, as she was thus engaged, Our Lord said to her: "And how wilt thou be able to recompense My Saints for such benefits? For indeed thou hast resolved to leave and set aside the offering which thou art thyself accustomed to make to Me in thanksgiving for all their beatitude." Confounded at these words, which discovered to her her mistake, the Saint went to Communion; and, after she had returned to her place, Our Lord made her this gentle reproach: "Gertrude, thou hadst this day resolved out of thine own will to serve Me in mud and straw and brick; for the inconsiderable services thou wast offering to Me are valueless even as things like these, compared to that which I choose for My offering, viz., the Sacrifice of My Body and Blood received in Holy Communion." Then

the Saint, perceiving that one of her sisters had abstained from Holy Communion that morning, said: "Lord, tell me why Thou didst permit her to be thus deceived." And He answered: "I was not the cause of it; but she has so veiled her eyes with considering only her own unworthiness, that she does not perceive My fatherly love, which longs to receive her into My arms."

Another story very similar to this is related by Père Saint-Jure in his book on the *Knowledge and Love of Jesus Christ.* "A certain holy soul," he says, "was once meditating how best to return the infinite love of God; and, quite transported by her own fervent desires, she broke out into rapture and exclaimed: 'Oh! my only Love, why have I not the hearts of all men with which to love Thee? Why have I not as many hearts and as many tongues as there are leaves on the trees, or drops of rain, or grains of sand on the seashore, that I might love and praise Thee as Thou deservest? Oh! that I could love Thee more than all creatures together, more than all the angels, and all the Saints, and all Paradise!' 'Be content, My Daughter,' replied Our Lord, 'this thou mayest do easily and simply. Hear Mass devoutly, and thou wilt give Me more love, more glory, more praise, more thanksgiving, than if thou alone didst possess the hearts of all men united.'"

Another very beautiful story occurs also in the life of St. Gertrude. She was assisting at Mass one day; and, just before the consecration, overwhelmed with the thought of the greatness of the Divine Sacrifice, she said: "O my God, I dare not lift up my eyes to behold this stupendous mystery of love, all unworthy as I am to take any part in it. Therefore, hiding myself in my own nothingness, I will await my portion of the grace which from this Altar Thou wilt distribute to Thy servants." Our Lord deigned to reply by this tender simile: "When an industrious mother intends to do some work in silk and pearls, she sometimes makes her little child mount on a stool and help her in threading the pearls, and so supplies for the child's smallness of stature. Just so do I act with thee. Employ thyself, therefore, not only in the consideration of thy own meanness, which sinks thee down beneath all things, but in thanking and loving Me, which raises thee up to Me; and thus so far as depends on thy small ability, thou wilt glorify Me by joining in the work of Holy Mass, whereby I delight to be glorified."

St. Leonard of Port Maurice, of whom it may be said that the Mass was his particular devotion, and who is the author of perhaps the most universally adopted method of hearing Mass now in use, has said many beautiful and instructive things on the inexhaustible treasure

of graces to be found in the Divine Sacrifice. He tells us how the Venerable Sister Francesca Farnese, a celebrated Carmelite nun, was once affected even to tears by the thought of how little she could do for God. Her own unworthiness, her own littleness, oppressed her with a sense of impotence, when Our Lady appeared to her, and placed the Infant Jesus in her arms, saying: "Take my Son, for He is thine; He will enable thee to fulfil all thou desirest." "O blessed Mass!" exclaims the Saint, "by it too the Divine Child is given into our hands. Into our hands, do I say? Nay rather into our hearts. 'Take Him; He is yours,' I hear it said from the lips of the Eternal Father; 'take Him and offer Him to Me; and you shall discharge all your debts.' He is ours, as it was said: 'A child is born to us and a son is given unto us' (*Isaias* ix. 6). He is ours; and with Him we can do all we wish."

St. John Chrysostom, who has said so many sublime and wonderful things on the subject of the Mass, makes one remark which is specially worthy of remembrance. He says, such is its efficacy, that there is no moment so favourable for us to present our prayers to God with an almost certainty of being heard; and that the angels, who know this better than we do, choose the Mass as the most favourable time for praying for us and interceding on our behalf. "At that moment," he says, "the angels

of God bow down and the archangels pray; there being no time which is better fitted for their ministry of intercession." And so, whilst we are often negligent, and slothful, and forgetful of this treasure, our angels value it for our sakes and are earnestly striving to turn these precious moments to the best account for us. "For," continues the Saint, "even as men carry olive branches when they would pacify a king, so the angels turn to the Body of Christ on the altar when they ask God to have mercy on us, their clients, as though they said: 'Behold, O, Lord, we pray for those for whom Thou didst die; we intercede for those for whom Thou didst shed that Precious Blood and offer that adorable Body now present on the altar.'"

The same great Doctor, speaking of the efficacy of the Mass as a sacrifice of thanksgiving, says that it enables us to give worthy thanks for all things, because it commemorates the greatest of all benefits. Thus David, having asked the question: "What shall I render to the Lord for all that He hath rendered unto me?" answers by saying: "I will take the chalice of salvation" (*Ps.* cxv. 12), that is, the eucharistic chalice, the chalice which contains the inexhaustible treasure which is the price of the world's redemption. St. Thomas tells us that the Mass in its quality of a sacrifice of impetration obtains for sinners in mortal sin the grace of repentance; for the just, the pardon

of venial sins and the remission of penalties due to them by means of the application of Our Lord's merits. Moreover, it obtains an increase in habitual grace and many actual graces which we need, adapted to the particular wants of each one.

Nevertheless, we are uniformly taught that, though the Mass in itself has virtue to obtain all these benefits for us, we receive more or less, and perhaps do not obtain any at all, in proportion to the devotion or indevotion with which we assist at it. To use the comparison of our Holy Mother, St. Catherine—"The fountain is always flowing, but we carry away more or less of its life-giving waters in proportion to the capacity of the vessels which we bring. And, if our vessel be full, *i.e.* if our heart be filled with sinful affections, it can receive nothing." Hence the necessity of assisting at Mass with great attention and devotion.

We will conclude with a very beautiful instruction on this subject from Père Saint-Jure in his *Treatise on the Knowledge and Love of Jesus Christ.* "When you enter church to hear Mass, do so with a recollection full of joy, remembering that you are about to engage in an action which is the most glorious and agreeable to God of any which man can perform, which will more abundantly apply to you the merits of Our Lord's death, and by which you can acquire the greatest possible amount of

graces and spiritual treasures. When Mass begins, form sentiments of profound reverence and respect, such as befit one who is about to enter the immediate presence of God. Remind yourself that He will shortly descend on the altar, attended by a train of heavenly splendour; nay, that the whole august Trinity assists at that great sacrifice wherein alone the majesty of God receives befitting homage. And angels and archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim, also gather round the altar, surrounding the ministering priest and regarding him with wonder and reverence. If you like, you can single out your own guardian angel from amidst the throng of blessed spirits and unite your worship with his, representing him as adoring with you and at your side. Oh! what modesty, what recollection would be ours, could we see with a more lively faith the mystery enacted before us! 'For that immaculate Host elevated before our eyes, what is it,' asks St. Chrysostom, 'but the Divine Sun of our souls, which the angels regard with trembling awe, not daring to gaze on it because of its marvellous and dazzling glory?' Surely we too, as we gaze should be so dazzled by its ineffable brightness as to be blinded to all besides, just as luminous objects by their radiance cause others which are less brilliant to disappear.

"To conclude," continues Père Saint-Jure, "I would remind you that there is no exercise

more useful than habitually to unite our intention with all the Masses that are being said throughout the world, and with the intentions of those who assist thereat with the greatest possible devotion. In this way we become partakers of a great treasure of merits in virtue of the communion of saints."

CHAPTER IV

THE OFFICE OF ANGELS AND OF MEN

WHAT is an Office? The word is taken to signify the principal duty of our state or condition of life. A man who holds any office is bound to fulfil the duties pertaining to it before engaging in any others; they take precedence of all else besides and make up the business of his life. To three classes of beings the praises of God constitute this primary business; they form the special office of angels, of priests, and of religious. Our idea of an angel is as standing day and night before the majesty of God, singing the never ending *Sanctus*. We know indeed that, as ministers of the Most High, angels have other offices; that they succour us by their care, that they execute the will

of their Creator in a thousand ways; yet, as we have said, our first and habitual thought of them pictures them as ever standing in their shining ranks, singing His praises and filling the courts of heaven with the harmony of eternal Lauds.

So too is it with a religious. She has many duties, many offices of charity, many works which give glory to God and are of benefit to mankind; but the primary idea of a cloistered nun depicts her to us in her stall in choir, singing her Office; because a sort of instinct tells us that this is her *Office*, the one thing she has to do in common with the angels. It is the first business of her life.

It follows as a matter of course that her chief care must be to do this duty well. St. Alphonsus Liguori tells us that two things are required to recite our Office properly, namely, intention and attention. Intention may be virtual, in virtue of a purpose made at the beginning to fulfil all that the Church commands and our Rule requires of us. Strictly speaking, this virtual intention suffices to satisfy our obligation. But, besides this, we may also have some actual intention, such as to implore a particular grace, to thank God for a special favour received, to honour some sacred mystery, or to satisfy for sin. Attention may, in like manner, be either virtual or actual; virtual, as our Constitutions tell us, when given in virtue of

a resolution made at the beginning to attend as well as we can; and actual, if during the course of the Office we are continually consciously occupied with God in some way or other, either by following the words or offering our prayer according to any approved method, of which there are a great many from which we may make choice, according to each one's devotion.

St. Thomas teaches that we may have attention by thinking either of God, to Whom we speak, or of the words spoken, or of the sense of the words. Prayer recited with any of these kinds of attention may be regarded as truly attentive. Hence, the Saint goes on to say, persons who do not understand the grammatical meaning of what they say may yet pray with attention, if their thoughts be occupied with God, or even if they be only careful rightly to pronounce the words and perform the accompanying ceremonies. "How can this be?" enquires an objector. "What good can there be in the simple articulation of words to which no meaning is attached?" "Much," replies the holy Doctor; "for, if with the intention of doing service to God I pronounce holy words, observe the appointed pauses, and make the prescribed prostrations, my soul and body are both engaged in doing homage to God and are thus offering Him an act of the virtue of religion."

As a matter of course, however, the more actual attention and intention we can infuse into our recitation of the Office the better; and for this purpose we certainly ought to take some pains in order to find out what method is best fitted to keep alive our devotion whilst engaged in this duty. The perpetual temptation of religious life is its danger of degenerating into routine. "There are many," says St. Augustin, "who at first pray with fervour and then fall into a certain languor; before long, the languor becomes insensibility and the insensibility grows into culpable negligence." When our Office becomes a burden to us, an obligation which we discharge grudgingly, there is reason to fear that we are on this downward path which the Saint describes.

Nevertheless let no one fear that the obligation is not fulfilled and that no fruit is derived from the Office, simply because in the discharge of this daily duty the mind is troubled by a crowd of distractions. "He prays in spirit and in truth," says St. Thomas, "who goes to prayer through the movement of the Holy Spirit, even though, whilst he prays, he is tormented by the wanderings of his imagination arising from human infirmity." And to the same effect St. Basil sweetly says: "If through weakness you cannot pray without distractions, do your best to recall and fix your thoughts, and rest assured that God will accept your good

will." Here is one of the gentle, indulgent sayings of the Saints: "Do your best;" God asks no more than this. "Do your best," and your prayer will be a good prayer and will find its way into His presence.

St. Gertrude at times suffered greatly from distractions whilst saying her Office. On one of these occasions Our Lord appeared to her and said: "Fear nothing, but commend thy prayer to My Heart, that I may supply what is deficient; and so shall it become perfect in My eyes." Another religious having asked the Saint what she should do to defend herself against distractions, she replied: "Sister, at the end of each hour say to Our Lord: 'O God, be merciful to me, a sinner;' and this will suffice to repair your defects."

There is also another story often related in spiritual books about a certain solitary named Honorius, who was accustomed to say his Office very distractedly, and who, having appeared after death to one of his friends, was asked by him what punishment had been inflicted on him for this fault "None," replied Honorius, "for, though it is true that I often said my Office negligently, yet I was in the habit of always offering the *Gloria Patri* at the end of each Psalm with all possible devotion in order to repair these defects; and thereby I have made satisfaction." This story may serve to show one very simple and excellent way of

recalling our wandering attention, namely, by making each *Gloria* a signal to remind us of what we are engaged in, thus exciting ourselves from time to time to renew our application to the presence of God.

Another very practical observation on this subject is to be found in the *Conferences of Cassian*. He says: "Be sure of this; you will always be in prayer exactly the same man you were when you began to pray." That is, your prayer will be good or bad in proportion as out of prayer your mind has been recollected or dissipated. Hence the value of preparation of mind; hence too the incalculable mischief in the spiritual life of hurry, precipitation, impetuosity, and preoccupation of mind. "A soul," says St. Teresa, "who runs to her Office will go on running right through it." Hence the precious value, if made the most of and observed with fidelity, of our rule of the first bell, rung as a signal a few minutes before the Office. St. Bernard was accustomed to say to himself on entering the choir, as though speaking to persons who were following him: "As for you, you may all wait outside." By these words he intended to address all his multifarious affairs and engagements, which he would not suffer to accompany him into the choir.

Sometimes it may help us to say our Office well if we reflect a little on its dignity. "When we sing the Office," says St. Bernardine of

Siena, "we are the mouthpiece of the whole Church." It will indeed be a blessed thing if we can acquire early in our religious life the sentiment, characteristic of our own Order and in a marked way characteristic of our Seraphic Mother, St. Catharine, which we can describe by no other phrase than "the spirit of the Church." An aptness for the language, the ceremonies, the seasons, and the office of Holy Church, a love of making her interests identical with our own, a solicitude for her glory, a frequent forgetting of our own selfish needs to think of her wants, a loyal appreciation of all that she prescribes, even down to the least rubric of the Breviary, and a jealousy of anything which bears the semblance of antagonism to her laws;—these are the indications of the spirit of the Church. One filled with this spirit will, when she says her Office, represent to herself that at that moment she intercedes for all sinners, that she implores graces for the whole world, that all Christian pastors and all their flocks have an interest in her fervent discharge of this duty. She will feel her heart spreading out and embracing all souls redeemed by the blood of her Spouse; and her intentions will fall short of nothing save His Divine Intentions when He hung bleeding on the Cross. "*Totius Ecclesiæ os!*" The mouth of the whole Church! What a dignity! What an office for a worm and a sinner! This was the spirit

which filled the great Apostle and which made St. John Chrysostom exclaim: "The heart of St. Paul was the heart of Jesus Christ!" The same words should be said of each of us. "We should be another Christ," says our Holy Mother, St. Catharine; and each one of the angels assisting in our choir, beholding our devotion, our charity, our forgetfulness of selfish interests in the all-absorbing zeal for the interests and the Glory of God and Holy Church, should be able to say: "The hearts of these religious are the heart of Jesus Christ; and it is fitting that they should be so, for they are the hearts of His Spouses."

There is another simple reflection on which we may sometimes dwell whilst preparing for the Office. It is that this duty, well performed, sanctifies the entire man. Our will is sanctified by being engaged in God's service and forming acts of love; our memory, by being occupied with holy mysteries; our understanding, by meditating on the word of God; our time, by being devoted to Him. Our lips are speaking to God; our ears are listening to His praises; our eyes rest on the page where His Name and His perfections are recorded; our whole body is engaged in doing Him homage, when we stand, or sit, or bow, as the ceremonial of religion requires. In a word, there is no moment of life in which the entire man, soul and body, may be more utterly given up to God,

and that without difficulty and without using any extraordinary effort, than when engaged in this common, daily duty of saying Office.

Again, the very inconveniences which we feel whilst reciting the Divine Office may help us to convert it into a sacrifice. "I will freely sacrifice to Thee," says David, "and will give praise, O God, to Thy Name" (*Ps.* liii. 8). In this duty, as has been said, we offer to God our will, our understanding, our senses, and our time; and often it has the character of a sacrifice in being painful. We have to endure bodily fatigue, mental disgust and weariness; we have perhaps to sacrifice an inclination to be otherwise employed: we have to do ourselves violence in order to restrain our wandering mind and imagination. All these things form a part of the sacrifice, and we should think ourselves happy that it is so, saying in the words of David, speaking to Areuna the Jebusite: "I will not offer to the Lord my God holocausts free-cost" (*2 Kings* xxiv. 24).

Lastly, if we would know the most excellent of all ways of saying our Office, it is that of which we continually remind ourselves, when, before beginning each Hour, we pronounce this little prayer: "Lord, in union with that intention wherewith Thou when on earth didst offer praises to God, I offer these Hours to Thee." This prayer was taught by Our Lord Himself to St. Mechtildis. "If any one," He

said, "desires that his prayers be united to Mine and infinitely ennobled in the eyes of God, let him habitually recite this prayer before the Canonical Hours; and in virtue of My Divine fidelity I promise that he shall never lose the fruit of his prayer." Prayer in union with the prayer of Our Lord is the prayer of the Saints. "This Divine Saviour," says St. Augustin, "prays for us as our High Priest, in us as our Head, and we pray to Him as our God." "When we pray," says another Father, "our mouth should be the mouth of Christ." And St. Teresa writes: "There is no better way of praying than to represent to ourselves Our Lord praying in us and with us." Of all prayers the Divine Office can be most easily adapted to this method, because, as we know, the Psalms which chiefly compose it are written at once in the person of Christ and of His Church; they express His sentiments and those of His members; and they were the very forms of prayer which He used as His own during the days of His mortal life on earth. By this union of our intention to His Divine intention, we become transfused into His sentiments and share in all the perfections of His prayer; and our office in a profound sense of the words becomes truly a Divine Office.

CHAPTER V

RECOLLECTION *

A HABIT of recollection is absolutely necessary in the spiritual life. Those charged with the guidance of souls can scarcely wonder at seeing so many well-meaning persons make no advance in devotion, in spite of all their exercises, observing how little they concern themselves with the practice of recollection. They have methods of prayer, corporal austerities, weekly confessions, and daily communions; they talk of prayer; they read a vast number of spiritual books; and they spend half their time in church. And yet, it may be, they are not spiritual, because, with all these holy exercises, they fail in humility, mortification, and recollection. It is of the last we are going to speak in this chapter, for it seems to contain an abridgment of many other perfections. It is of all exercises one of the most efficacious; and, whilst subjecting the soul to a kind of holy constraint, it at the same time places it in a state of admirable interior liberty. It is that "hidden man of the heart," whereof St. Peter

* This Instruction is abridged from *Maximes Spirituelles pour la conduite des âmes,* by Père Guilloré, S.J.

speaks, "in the incorruptibility of a quiet and a meek spirit, which is rich in the sight of God" (1 *Peter* iii. 4).

Recollection may be defined as the habit of living within one's own heart by a disengagement from created things. Silence, solitude, and a guard of the exterior senses are the best means of acquiring it; and, when once acquired, it is not easily disturbed even in the midst of exterior work. For although, when we are engaged in exterior duties, we should apply our senses and our mind to them in such a way as to do them well, we must not let the multiplicity of occupations or our own unrestrained and unmortified eagerness in pursuing them draw us out of our retreat. One of the chief characteristics of recollection is its tranquillity; it spreads a quiet calm over the whole soul, as though the waters of peace were always flowing gently through the heart. Hence it becomes a matter of solicitude to suppress and avoid whatever troubles or disquiets this tranquillity; for, let it be remembered, uneasiness and disturbance are enemies to the movements of God. This virtue is lost by whatever dissipates the mind and causes the spirit to evaporate, so to speak, whether it be too unrestrained a gaiety which degenerates into frivolity, or that over-eagerness in work which makes the soul pour itself out too freely on exterior duties, or again certain deliberate imperfections, which,

when committed, draw down as a chastisement the loss of our interior peace. We may instance as such imperfections criticism of the faults of others, breaches of silence, and a desire of being noticed and esteemed.

Let us now see something of the necessity of this virtue. There is no one who will not readily allow that prayer, mortification, and self-knowledge are absolutely necessary to all Christians, and especially to those who aspire to perfection. Such being the case, recollection is equally necessary; for without it we can practise none of these virtues. First, as to prayer. Oh! that we could undeceive a vast number of good people who aspire to prayer and yet apply themselves to everything rather than to that which really constitutes its science! What is more common than to find persons who tease their directors for methods of prayer and new rules for practising it, just as if prayer were a trade that could be learnt like shoe-making or dress-making by following a few precise, mechanical directions? What simplicity to suppose that they can learn to pray in this way, when all the time they are taking no heed to restrain their senses and are living as they like, dissipated and subject to no laws of discipline! For they do not see that all these excellent rules are unavailing without the habit of continual recollection, which alone is capable of nourishing and keeping alive the spirit of prayer.

We must try to engrave on our mind three important principles. 1. In order to succeed in prayer, we must accustom ourselves to a constant familiarity with God throughout the day. Then, when the time of prayer comes, a closer communication with Him will not be difficult. How is it possible for a heart which is dissipated and distracted during fourteen hours of the day suddenly to become recollected and absorbed in God during the fifteenth, just because the clock tells us that the time to make our meditation has come? No; the heart must be trained to move freely towards God throughout the day; and then it will move towards Him and remain peacefully in His presence in the time of prayer. It is an absurdity to think that we can in the space of an hour do well that to which we have given no thought during all the preceding hours.

2. In order to pray well, our imagination must be emptied of the crowd of images which beset it and which are the origin of all distractions. This is the very work of recollection, whereby we close the door in their face and shut them out.

3. In order to pray well, we must aim at purity of heart; because the end of prayer is union with God, and He unites Himself only to those whose hearts are ready to receive Him. Now a person, however learned he may be in methods of prayer, will never succeed in pray-

ing if he is full of unrestrained nature, if he is dissipated, or if his mind is open all day long to things of sense, even though they may be innocent, seeking to taste all, and know all, and observe all, and enjoy all. By these means the soul becomes filled with a thousand worldly, or human, or sensual extravagances gathered through all the inlets of the senses. The heart of such a person is not pure in the sense in which this purity is a condition for prayer. Hence, in spite of all his efforts and all his familiarity with methods of prayer, he cannot pray, because he is not recollected.

Recollection, on the other hand, (1) is employed all day long in withdrawing the powers of the soul from exterior things and directing them to God; and then, when the hour for prayer comes, the soul goes to no new and strange duty, but to one which is merely the continuation and consummation of that exercise in which it is always sweetly and unconsciously engaged.

2. Recollection empties the soul of frivolous images, those images which are the very tormentors of our prayer; and thus is our best defence against distractions.

3. It is recollection which purifies the heart. In that calm tranquillity of soul which has been already described, the subtle movements of nature are instantly detected and easily checked; and thus a recollected soul is always

fit to enter into communication and union with its God.

Having shown the connection between recollection and prayer, let us now see how it helps us in the exercise of the second great and necessary duty of a Christian life, *viz.*, mortification. Show me a mind which is dissipated and evaporated, and I will readily show you that such a soul is incapable of true mortification. Why so? you will say. 1. Because mortification demands constant watchfulness against the assaults of sense, whereas a dissipated spirit is never on its guard, but is ready to be overcome in a moment. 2. Mortification requires a certain hatred of self; and how can that be found in a heart which by dissipation is always indulging the senses in a thousand subtle ways? 3. Mortification is a difficult thing to practise; it presupposes the knowledge of the pressing necessity of such a restraint on nature; and how can we gain this knowledge if we are habitually out of ourselves, and, as has been said, distracted?

Lastly, the third duty required of a Christian is self-knowledge; and here too we may see the use of recollection. To gain true knowledge of self we require patiently to keep watch over the movements of our heart. How subtle these movements are and how easily they escape detection we all know. We must watch them, therefore, patiently, quietly, perseveringly;

and this we cannot do if our attention be dissipated by being constantly directed on exterior things. Hence recollection is essential for obtaining self-knowledge. By means of it we become attentive to what passes in our own hearts. We see things in the light of God imaged on the mirror of our own interior tranquillity. On this mirror, as on a calm sheet of water, the slightest ruffle is distinctly discernible, and we are able to trace it to its cause. St. Paul tells us: "The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 *Cor.* ii. 10), and He makes known to man the deep things also of his own heart and conscience. A recollected person, moreover, is always a thoughtful person. Thus, reflecting on what he beholds within himself, he learns to sound the abyss of his own nothingness and the abyss of God's perfections; and so he grows in the true science of the Saints and learns to distinguish the operations of God from those of nature.

Let us now consider how this virtue of recollection can best be acquired. We may have delusions even on this subject and make it consist in a perpetual occupation with self or again in a certain idleness and emptiness of soul which we persuade ourselves is spiritual tranquillity. Let us, however, aim at something true, simple, and solid. For the sake of those who are beginners in the spiritual life we would

say, if they would gain true recollection, they should accustom themselves to constant meditation on the life of Our Divine Lord. The thought of Him, of His character, of some mystery of His life, the memory of Him in one shape or another, should be always present with them. This will defend them equally from emptiness of mind and from self-occupation, the two spurious imitations of recollection of which we have spoken.

The memory of Our Lord's holy Humanity, the object of all our love, is that which is most capable of arresting the dissipation of our imagination. We become captivated with the thought of His modesty, His holiness, His gracious condescension, as a painter is absorbed in the idea of the picture he is about to represent on canvas. If then you would gain true recollection, the first advice given by spiritual writers is that you should strive to engrave on your heart the memory of your Divine Spouse. You will soon find that in all places and at all times, in the midst even of the most distracting employments, your thoughts will discover a secret and most sweet occupation. You may think of Him in whatever way you will, as your Spouse, your King, your Lord, your Friend; you need not be constrained by any laws; only remember the sweet necessity of thinking of Him in some way or other, believing that the best way will soon discover itself to

a heart that has once been touched and wounded by the contemplation of so sweet and divine an object.

Here is the centre of true recollection—recollection in Jesus, not recollection in self. Here is the death of passion and the death of self.

The second advice is for those who have already begun to practise recollection; let them be simple and not try to fill their mind with too many thoughts. Their aim is not to have fine thoughts about spiritual things, but to be dwelling habitually, quietly, and with great freedom in God's presence, abandoned to His Will.

Your care must be to follow exactly all the dictates of grace. Of what use would it be for you to see all that God demands of you and to hear all that He says to you, unless you obey? We do not by this advocate scrupulosity; God forbid! but you are urged to flee from voluntary imperfections. They choke the avenues of grace, they soil the purity of our conscience, they hinder in an inconceivable degree the intercourse of our hearts with God. Flee also from spiritual curiosity, the desire of having always some light, or feeling, or consolation present to your consciousness. Cherish rather spiritual poverty, which is content with God and busies not itself with this profusion and complication of spiritual luxuries. Never torment yourself in order to preserve recollection by forced constraint upon the mind. We need

not be always lying in ambush against a distraction or an imperfection; this violence which we do to our souls is contrary to that gentleness and tranquillity in which God loves to work. Perhaps God sees fit to give you very few thoughts and to treat you as one of small capacity for Divine things. If so, be content to be little and poor and the prisoner of so good a God. The measure of each one's recollection is not the same; if yours be not very high, let this serve as a source of humiliation but not of disturbance; and leave all in the hands of God.

Before concluding, I must warn you that to acquire and preserve recollection often demands a painful sacrifice. You must not expect that, as you walk by the side of Jesus through the day, He will always take you up to Thabor. Sometimes He will bend His steps to Calvary; and then you must follow. Again, sometimes He will be quite silent; you will have no sweet and refreshing thoughts, no delightful memories of His perfections; there will be an emptiness, and a weariness, and a blank within you, because He is keeping silence. Be it so; keep silence with Him. Follow Him even into the desert; only be content with following Him. Sometimes He will seem to treat you with indifference and to be deaf to your prayers; again, at other times, tormenting thoughts will present themselves and the temptation will often arise

to flee from them by exterior distractions. But have courage. Do not give up the interior life because you find it something more than a mere tender reverie. Do not fall into the delusion of seeking the sweets of intercourse with God rather than God Himself. Do not, like the faithless Jews, refuse to follow Him unless He can feed you with loaves; but follow Him in faith and keep close to His side. Nay, even if He seem angry, let your heart learn not to withdraw from God nor to refuse to submit to be the victim of His just chastisements.

"If any one abide not in Me, he shall be cast forth as a branch and shall wither; and they shall gather him up and cast him into the fire, and he burneth" (*St. John* xv. 6). In this passage we see the fourfold punishment of a soul that will not abide in Christ by the practice of recollection. A soul without recollection is exiled (and self-exiled) from God's continual presence. It is "cast forth as a branch," given over to the things of sense. This dwelling with exterior and created things, this occupation with gossip, news, company, seeing and hearing, and tasting and enjoying, what is all this but a banishment from God? The dissipated soul finds no enjoyment in God's society; hence it goes forth to seek for relish and to beg for it outside itself. It has no enjoyment in the thought of Jesus; it seeks it in the thought of the meanest and most contemptible trifles. Hence it becomes earthly and animal in its

tastes; and, just as "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" with Him (1 *Cor.* vi. 17), so the soul united to human, worldly, or sensual trifles becomes human, worldly, and sensual in its tastes and spirit.

If any one abide not in Jesus by recollection, "he is cast forth as a branch, and," continues Our Lord, "he shall wither;" *i.e.* prayer and all spiritual exercises dry up. Here is the second chastisement, aridity. We are cut off from the sap of the vine and we wither.

"And they shall gather him up." Here is the third chastisement, to be gathered into faggots, *i.e.* to get into such a state of slavery that we are, as it were, tied up and so are in some sense incapacitated from returning to God. The chains of our dissipated habits of mind tie us and hinder us; we are gathered into faggots.

And, lastly, we are "burned." That is, having opened our senses by dissipation, we have kindled the fire of a thousand temptations, and by them we are scorched and burnt.

Let us conclude with a few words on the happiness attached to this virtue. It is difficult to speak of this, because it is most difficult to express the sweetness of familiar intercourse with God. St. Teresa tells us that one word of His once sufficed to put her into ecstasy. Now in the solitude of recollection we listen continually to the voice of God. "I will lead her into the wilderness and I will speak to her heart"

(*Ossee* ii. 14). Moreover, there is inexpressible delight in that fuller understanding of Divine things which is enjoyed by a recollected soul. God discovers to such a one the secret things of His law. Such a soul becomes wiser than the ancients, and without study there is communicated to it the infused science of the Holy Ghost. It has an admirable relish for all that is of God; a word, a spiritual book, anything is capable of touching and awakening such a heart; because recollection has the power of always preserving a sense of Divine unction; and, like a well-strung lute which is always ready to give out harmony at the slightest touch, the recollected soul is always in tune for God.

Then there comes a sensitiveness of conscience which is alive to the smallest imperfection and so keeps the soul in great purity. Needless to say there is nothing which causes so much joy and peace and sweetness in a soul as interior purity of heart.

Moreover, we grow in a measure independent of things and persons, of times, and places, and occupations. Our occupation is always the same. We carry our real life and our real joy with us and within us. We dwell under the same roof with God, or rather He dwells with us in the very centre of our heart. Everything exterior, therefore, fades in our consideration; and the changes and chances of mortal life affect us very little.

Who then would not covet recollection, if all that has been said be true, if it be at once the sovereign happiness of the soul, the most eminent perfection, the road which leads to God and the dwelling-place of the Most High, the source of all Divine knowledge, and the secret of that sweetness which surpasses all relish and all joys that have their origin in nature or in sense?

CHAPTER VI

MENTAL PRAYER *

MOST persons feel a difficulty in making daily meditation in a way which shows that it is not a thing which can be done without method or without painstaking. We all want to know how to do it; and yet, generally speaking, methods of meditation frighten us by the complexity and multiplicity of their requirements. They seem to give us in the space of half-an-hour, twenty or thirty things to be done, the very names of which different acts we find it a labour to remember. It is easy,

* The substance of this Instruction is drawn from an instruction in catechetical form, occurring in a book entitled *Règles et Maximes spirituelles pour la conduite des personnes de piété qui tendent à la perfection,* par le Rev. Père Huby, S.J.

however, to make a very simple process of the mind appear complex by forming it into a system and giving it a name. If people will take the trouble of going through one of these systems and reducing it to a simpler form, they will see that they have been perhaps following unconsciously the Ignatian or some other method all their lives; and that in fact they can never think out any subject without putting their minds into a succession of attitudes as it were, now of reflection, now of desire, and now of resolution, which when applied to the subject of prayer, drawn up under heads, and distinguished by names more or less pretentious, give us the disheartening conviction that, if all this is necessary in order to make a meditation, such prayer is beyond us.

We are going, therefore, to take one of the fullest and most complete instructions on Mental Prayer that has been written, and see if, complex as it appears when we read it over as a Catechism, it will not reduce itself to something quite simple and practical when put into another shape.

In the first place, Père Huby's definition of prayer is well worth remembering. He calls it "the application and elevation of our mind and heart to God, in order to pay Him our homage and to become more fit to advance His glory." In prayer, therefore, or at any rate in meditation, we have to apply our mind and our heart,

i.e. our understanding and our will, to Divine things. And we are to do this, not as a sort of intellectual exercise, but with the twofold intention of honouring God and sanctifying our own souls.

What is the first thing necessary in order to pray well? It evidently consists in some sort of preparation of heart. Our own intellect and natural sense tell us that a soul habitually poured out on frivolous amusements, eagerly devoted to some absorbing occupation, or ensnared in unmortified affections, will never be able to have command over her thoughts and her will during the hour of meditation. The imagination of such a one will be full of worldly or distracting images; her heart, instead of moving to God, will move towards the object of her affections; nor is it to be supposed that she can enjoy any sweet or intimate familiarity with God during her prayer when she never cultivates the thought of Him during the rest of the day. Hence some degree of purity of heart and mortification of the passions is absolutely necessary for any one who desires to form the habit of prayer. Our prayer will be perfect in proportion to the degree of interior purity to which we attain; and the Saints attained to their high states of prayer because they at the same time laboured incessantly to mortify the flesh and the spirit. This point is of vital importance in many ways; amongst others, because it strikes

at the root of one large form of spiritual delusion, *viz.* that which relies on spiritual exercises and gives no care to the mortification of the interior man; which will meditate on humility and cherish pride in the soul; speak evil of its neighbour and recite a whole chaplet of acts of the love of God. Our Divine Lord Himself again and again exposed its fallacy; as, for example, when He said: "Leave thy offering before the altar and go first to be reconciled with thy brother, and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift" (*St. Matt.* v. 24); and again: "Not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of My Father Who is in heaven" (*St. Matt.* vii. 21). This is what is meant by the *distant preparation.*

But, besides this habitual preparation of heart, a person ought not to go to prayer without an actual preparation at the time. Our own community rule of leaving off occupations at the first bell suggests exactly what is necessary, *viz.* the putting of our minds into a state of composure and recollection in order to give the necessary application of mind and heart to God. Moreover, it is evident that, on beginning a meditation, we must not do so abruptly, as it were, without asking light from God and offering what we are going to do to Him, however simply and briefly this may be done. Probably the simplest and best preparation of all is an

act of the presence of God, which Père Huby divides into two parts, (1) an act of faith in His presence in our hearts, and (2) an act of adoration; and it is hardly necessary to say that these two acts may be perfectly well performed by a simple movement of the heart, which need not occupy a minute. Here is the *proximate preparation.*

Our hearts being now in a tranquil, recollected and reverent state, we are fit to begin our prayer. We are about then to apply our mind and heart to God; *i.e.* for half an hour to let our understanding and our will be engaged on some devout mystery or affection. Here is the point where the supposed difficulty of mental prayer begins. Some persons find in themselves an absolute incapacity for the application of mind; others again are not able to employ their imagination upon the mystery in the way they find drawn out for them; and others, impressed with the idea that the affections are everything, are disappointed to discover that they cannot raise any affections at all, and that they are simply empty, and cold, and distracted. Others, who endeavour faithfully to follow a system, harass themselves with the attempt to use first their imagination, then their reason, and then their affections in the prescribed order, when perhaps they are being interiorly attracted to some other mode of prayer altogether.

Two things, therefore, are necessary to observe: First as the end of prayer is the movement and union of the heart to God, if, when we place the subject of meditation before us, as death, or judgment, or some divine mystery, as Our Lord washing His disciples' feet or the like, we immediately find our heart attracted and our will moved in some particular way, and our soul engaged with God, it would be an evident mistake for us to disengage our soul from these affections and begin a set of preludes and considerations, the end of which is, after all, chiefly to excite those very affections which have already been excited in a simpler and easier way. We must let God draw our hearts in His own way; and, finding ourselves at the place where we wanted to arrive, we need not retrace our steps in order to arrive at it by another and longer road. This is quite certain. But on the other hand it is equally certain that this principle, falsely taken up by idle souls, encourages them in their idleness.

A mind that has never been used to reflect on divine things finds at first a difficulty in doing so. At once, perhaps, it takes refuge in the thought: "I am drawn to affective prayer; and therefore there is no occasion for me to lose my time in meditation. The affections are everything; it is no matter whether I use my reason or my imagination," etc. Such souls are perhaps the very ones who, were they sin-

cere with themselves, would own that when they try to form their affections, they feel quite dull and empty; and, if they gave a true account of their half-hour's meditation, it would be simply that they had thought about nothing at all.

We must always remember that, ordinarily speaking, at any rate with beginners, the affections will not move of themselves. There must be a motive power. Thus, to make an act of the love of God, we must have the motive that He is infinitely good. Here you see that the thought "God is infinitely good" is in our understanding, going before and inflaming the heart to form the affection, "Therefore I love Him." Divines express this by saying that "the operation of the understanding always precedes that of the will." We must know in order to love and to will. I ask you: "Do you wish to read this book or that?" You will answer: "I know nothing about either, so I have no choice." But I say: "This one is by St. Francis de Sales and that is by Martin Luther." Then you will reply: "Now I know enough to make me resolve to read the one and burn the other."

It is so with everything. Light always precedes heat. The sun at his first rising gives a burst of light with no heat; if you wait patiently, his rays will gradually shed warmth over the earth; but the light comes first. In meditation you reflect on humility. You meditate on the

truth that we have nothing of ourselves, and in ourselves are absolutely nothing. Here is an exercise of the understanding. It is by no means being humble to see this truth and accept it; but it gives us a powerful motive and assistance to become humble. It puts a sound principle into our understanding, on which if we dwell, we shall find it easier to elicit, first, a sense that we ought to be humble; then a desire to be humble; then an earnest prayer, and finally, perhaps, a practical resolution to perform this or that particular act of humility. It is in this way that the exercise of the understanding helps the exercise of the will.

Again, how greatly meditation, *i.e.* tranquil, patient reflection on the mysteries of the Passion and the Blessed Eucharist helps us to be devout to them. We cannot have anything like a profound love of Our Lord without meditation; we may have transient emotions and occasionally very sensible ones; but for them to sink deep into our souls we must weigh and ponder over all that is involved in the *Verbum caro factum est.* "Deep calleth on deep" (*Ps.* xli. 7); we get glimpses of the marvels of His love for us, the ineffable abasements He endured for us; and as we see this more, we love more tenderly and we adore more profoundly. So with the Blessed Sacrament; it is as our faith deepens and develops in all that is involved in that Adorable Presence that we gain a solid

and lively devotion to it; and it is probably for want of this application of mind to these Divine Mysteries that we so often see the disagreeable mixture of devotion (of a certain shallow kind) with want of real faith and real reverence.

Besides all this, we ought to take into consideration the fact that prayer is an act whereby we offer to God the soul with all its powers. The reason and the imagination have as good a right to be sanctified as the will. Every one will agree that the mere thinking about God will never of itself take a man to heaven, whereas loving God will do so; but for all that it is a very good thing to have the habit of thinking about God. We must think about something. If we do not take some pains to form a habit of thinking on Divine things, our thoughts will occupy themselves with earthly things. Our interior life is made up of thoughts; and it is a very vital question with us how we are to sanctify that interior life. Why are we troubled with bad thoughts, useless thoughts, vain thoughts, and, above all, distractions? Simply because our minds must feed on something; and, as we do not supply them with better food or form in them an appetite for it, they seek food for themselves, and often such as is very hurtful. We are then unreasonable enough to kneel down and pray, say our Office, hear Mass, and meditate; and are surprised at finding that

the first thing which presents itself is a crowd of distractions, not reflecting that this is what must necessarily be expected from an undisciplined understanding and a vagabond imagination.

It is of the utmost importance, then, to fill our imagination with holy images in order to keep out images of sense and to accustom our thoughts to entertain themselves with God, if only in order to prevent them from entertaining themselves with creatures, or with that worst of creatures, self.

Therefore we take it for granted that it is desirable in ordinary cases to spend some time in *reflection* or consideration of the subject-matter of meditation; and just as, when attracted to affections, we are not to force ourselves to reason so, when our mind is powerfully drawn to the contemplation of some Divine mystery, we should be very foolish to break off in order to produce resolutions and the rest, *i.e.*, to do so forcibly. Our half-hour will have been very well spent, even if we have not gone through more than one part of the meditation; and, if the result has been to realise some spiritual truth or mystery of faith more perfectly in our soul, even only intellectually, we may depend upon it we have gained something solid. In all this we must suffer ourselves to be led by the spirit of God and preserve interior freedom. Here then is the first part

of meditation, the application of the understanding, which Père Huby calls *adoration* and others simply *consideration.*

If we have thus reflected on any subject for some minutes continuously, we cannot fail to come to some conclusion. It is no reflection at all if we do not; it is mere dreaming. For instance, we consider: "This book is written by St. Francis de Sales. I know his other books are just what I like. Hence I wish I might read this. I will ask leave to do so." In the same way, we meditate earnestly for ten minutes on Our Lord washing His disciples' feet. We ask ourselves, "Who is it that is doing this? For whom does He do it?" We realise in a very vivid manner His astonishing self-abasement, His condescension to His disciples; and it is impossible for us not to go on to think: "Then it is not much for me to humble myself; and certainly I ought not to feel it difficult to do some mean, or laborious, or lowly office, or put myself beneath one of my Sisters." If our meditation does not result in some sort of affection like this, it would be a questionable sort of meditation. Perhaps we might find out we had only been indulging our imagination, painting a beautiful picture as it were, and getting no fruit at all out of it.

Having got as far as this and perceived a particular perfection or grace represented in this mystery, we naturally turn to God to ask Him

for it, or to tell Him how much the seeing of it in Jesus Christ makes us feel our own want of it, to humble ourselves at not having it, to implore His pardon and His help to attain it; in fact, we begin to pray. Here is the second part of meditation, which Père Huby calls *Communion, i.e.*, communing with God; and he tells us that the holy Fathers declare we may gain as much by this communion of His virtues and perfections as we do by that of His Body and Blood.

When we have reflected on a subject, applied it to our own conscience, and asked God to help us to gain what we require, it is evident that we can hardly have gone through these several processes, in themselves so simple, without coming to a resolution. At least we ought not to expect that thinking about God or praying to God will accomplish the whole thing, unless we do something ourselves or at least resolve to do so. "How humble Our Divine Lord was! How much I desire to be humble! O Lord, make me humble of heart!" All these are links in a chain of meditation, but the last link is: "With Thy grace to help me, I resolve to overcome that particular bit of self-love and practise that particular act, the opportunity for which will, I know, present itself to-day." And this is what is meant by *co-operation.*

Having made such a resolution, we naturally

turn once more to God to ask Him to help us to keep it; and this prayer, which really concludes the meditation, must be humble, full of confidence, and persevering. This is the *first conclusion.* Possibly, as we make it, the thought suggests itself of commending our petition to the patronage of Our Blessed Lady or our Patron Saint. Here is the *second conclusion.*

And then we think: "Not to forget this resolution or the impression made on my soul in this meditation, I wish I could remind myself of it during the day. What struck me most in it was the thought, it was God Who thus lowered Himself to His own creatures. 'The servant is not greater than his Lord' (*St John* xiii. 16); and, if He lowered Himself, it is no great thing for me to lower myself;" and so the words: "The servant is not greater than His Lord" sum up and express the idea we have gathered out of our meditation; and we resolve to repeat them to ourselves during the day, whenever we are tempted to be proud, or punctilious, or to refuse to mortify our self-love. This is the spiritual posy.

Here then is a meditation full and complete. We might if we chose write it down in its several parts and assign to each its scientific name; in which case we should be called on to write down such a number of subdivisions as would be enough to discourage any soul from

attempting to do what is, after all, viewed in the simple light of common sense, the easiest thing in the world.

In this instruction a great many ramifications have been omitted in order to reduce the whole to its very simplest form. All the divisions enumerated and analysed by Père Huby may be comprised in (1) Preparation, remote and proximate; (2) the body of the meditation, including Adoration, Communion, and Co-operation; (3) the Conclusion; and lastly, the Spiritual Posy. It need scarcely be said that no one need be fidgety if unable to get through these divisions. With some it may happen as to the Venerable Agnes of Jesus that it is enough for them to make their first act of the presence of God to be at once tranquilly engaged with this idea, which may occupy them during the whole half hour of meditation to the exclusion of all exercises of the understanding. If so their meditation will have been very well made; and they need have no scruples about the points they have omitted.

It may also be observed that, though this is the ordinary outline of a meditation properly so called, there are many other ways of meditating; and, provided we do meditate and make the time a time of prayer, it is not required of us to follow one method rather than another.

CHAPTER VII

WORK

WORK is a Divine institution. It is perhaps the oldest of all God's institutions, older than any precept of the moral law. For not only did God lay it upon Adam as a command when he was expelled from Paradise to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow, but even in Paradise he worked. "The Lord God took man and put him into the paradise of pleasure, to dress it and to keep it" (*Gen.* ii. 15). Imagine any state of life without work of some kind, either mental or corporal, and at once you have the idea of a state unsanctified and sensual, an existence in which half the faculties of man are unemployed and in which none are directed to the end of their creation.

Work is of three kinds and may be divided under the three heads of manual labour, study, and teaching. Each of these three finds its place amongst ourselves; and regarding each we shall find wise and practical directions in the writings of the Saints.

The first kind of work of which we have to

speak is manual labour, in which we may include as well that which is of a servile description, such as the ordinary household duties in which we have to take part as a portion of our daily life, as other active but less laborious occupations. With us there seems to be a special necessity for regarding these duties from a religious point of view. They form a part of our religious obligations, inasmuch as we have embraced the necessity of practising them. It is therefore of the utmost importance for us to understand the value of work, that we may more easily acquire the spirit of our Rule. For we must not be content with merely conforming to what our Constitutions prescribe; we must apply ourselves generously and loyally to love these ordinances for their own sake. Let us therefore not grudge spending some time in endeavouring to gain a true and religious view of manual labour, a duty which from the very beginning of Christianity has been associated with the idea of religious life, and without which, we might almost make bold to say, that life would lose a great portion of its distinctively spiritual character.

When we said just now that the command laid on Adam after his fall was to labour, it is evident that some profound signification lay in such a command. We may be sure it was not given merely as a punishment, as a curse. It was given at the same moment as the promise

of a Saviour. It had, therefore, a connection with that work of regeneration which was to lift man out of the depths into which he had fallen. It was given as a means of sanctification, as a discipline of humiliation, as a rule of mortification, as a daily homage of adoration, as a part of that war upon sensuality and pride, the twofold disease of body and soul which man had incurred by Adam's sin.

Bodily labour humbles the flesh and it humbles the spirit. It is a safer mortification than any self-imposed penance; it reminds us of our continual state of subjection and opposes itself to the haughty independence of spirit which we have to wear out of ourselves by painful and repeated acts of lowliness. It nurtures in us habits, and daily habits, of lowliness; it compels the body to be a servant and thereby usefully reminds us what place best becomes that proud rebel. It healthfully restrains the subtlety of intellectual pride, which fondly flatters itself that its lofty intelligence should only be employed on exalted and intellectual objects. It offers continual occasions for the exercise of patience, charity, and humility, those three sister-virtues which whoso possesses is possessed of the three keys of sanctity. It is the closest imitation of the life of Our Lord and His Blessed Mother; and this alone is enough to show us that it is the fittest life for us.

A certain solitary, being asked which is the greatest of all virtues, answered, "Humility;" and, being further asked what were the best means to acquire this virtue, he replied: "It is a wholly Divine work; nevertheless the best means are to embrace bodily labour, to acknowledge yourself a sinner, and to submit yourself to every one." Hence we find innumerable stories of the ancient solitaries, which reveal to us the extraordinary value which they set on bodily labour. We read of one in the desert of Scete, who, though quite blind, used to go a long distance every day to fetch water from a well. In order to find his way thither, he fastened a string from his cell to the well, by means of which he guided his steps. A young monk, touched with compassion, once offered to undertake this labour for him; but the old man would not hear of such a thing. "It is now twenty-two years," he said, "since I took upon myself this toil; do not, I beseech you, deprive me of the fruit of my labours."

It is the doctrine of the Saints that, the more painful and laborious any office, the more generous are the virtues it produces in the soul. "The labours of a religious man," says St. Bernard, "are the seed of eternity. The seed is cast in tears, but the sheaves are carried home in joy." It is related of Brother John Ximenes, a Jesuit lay-brother, that, as he returned from his daily work, he was wont to pray to God

and speak in dialogue to himself in this manner. "Where are you going, Ximenes?" he would ask. "To the College, to rest." "And if on your arrival, such or such work is ordered you?" "Well, I will do it with all my heart." And then he would add, "O Lord, grant that I may be commanded to do that very work;" and very often it would happen that God, to satisfy his zeal, would permit that the very labour he had proposed should be laid upon him by obedience. This is related in the life of Father Balthazar Alvarez, who adds, "However fatigued Brother John might be, he always applied himself to the work in question with the greatest joy, especially if it were of a humiliating and contemptible kind."

Father Le Blanc * enumerates the different advantages to be derived from manual labour as follows: 1. It satisfies for past sins, and the more so in proportion as it is hard or humiliating; 2. It is a remedy against temptations. In this light it was regarded by the holy Fathers, concerning whom many stories bearing on this point are related; as for instance how St. Macarius, being assailed by temptations of various kinds, gave himself over to the most laborious manual employments. Another solitary, meeting him one day with an enormous load on his shoulders, asked him what he was

* *Le Saint Travail des mains, ou la manière de gagner le Ciel par la pratique des actions manuelles.* Par le R. Père Thomas Le Blanc.

doing; to which he replied: "I am tormenting my tormentors," meaning his troublesome thoughts. An angel came from heaven to teach St. Anthony the secret of mingling prayer and work together. The Saint had embraced a life of uninterrupted contemplation and found himself beset by harassing temptations and a disgust for the solitary life. The angel appeared to him, first lifting his hands to heaven in prayer, then stooping to the ground, as though occupied in hewing wood, etc. These movements having lasted alternately for some minutes, the Saint asked for an explanation. "It is to make thee understand that thou shouldst pray for a while and work for a while," was the reply. Anthony followed the directions thus given and at once began to devote some hours every day to manual labour, whereupon his temptations ceased. 3. Work is the mother of courage, magnanimity, and other generous virtues, because it is the enemy of sloth. 4. It has the special privilege of gaining us joy at the hour of death. Paul of Catania, a Capuchin lay-brother, saw in ecstasy the judgments which God reserves for idle religious and the rewards with which, at the hour of death, He consoles those who discharge their ordinary duties with fervour and exactitude.

"The man," says St. Augustin, "who does well the work which his hands find to do, offers to God an agreeable sacrifice of praise." And

what is it to work well? Father Le Blanc answers this question by saying that three things are required for the sanctification of manual labour, viz.: 1. Consideration or deliberation; 2. Love; 3. the pure and simple desire to please God.

1. Without a certain degree of deliberateness in our actions, we cannot, he says, infuse into them either love or purity of intention. In impetuosity and hurry there is always much of nature and consequently much of self. Father Balthazar Alvarez tells a story about Brother John Ximenes which is much to the point. This excellent religious, being one day at work with another lay-brother, took occasion mildly to reprove him for his incessant bustle and want of recollection. The other replied somewhat rudely: "It would be a fine thing truly if I were to be as leisurely as you; you spend half-an-hour in going up and down stairs, whilst I can run up and down a dozen times in the same time." "Dearest Brother," said Ximenes, "when I go upstairs, I go in company with Our Lord in His flight into Egypt; and, when I come down, I accompany the Holy Family back to Nazareth. I do this that I may serve them on their way; and I never found my work hindered by my leisurely way of walking." Here then is the first quality of our manual work; let it be done gently, with deliberation, so that the mind may have breathing-space for

a religious, recollected, interior spirit. Remember that it is not every one who can expect to be carried up and down stairs by angels; and, unless so aided to go quickly, it is better to imitate Brother Ximenes and go slowly with Our Lady, St. Joseph and the Holy Child.

2. Love. We are servants in one sense but not in another. In subjection, in humility, in lowliness of service we should indeed be servants; yet not with that servile spirit which works from necessity, but out of love. Love is the motive of the service of children, not of that of slaves, and we are not slaves but children. Do not be content with letting your hands do menial services; let your hearts do them also. Let us hear a great heathen writer, Seneca, on this point. He says: "The heart renders little services great, and the meanest, illustrious, when they are not merely well done, but done out of love and with pleasure." How sweet is that work which is done for the love of God! And so, when our holy Mother, St. Catharine of Siena, was working in the kitchen, thinking of her parents as in the place of Christ and of her brothers as the Apostles, and living all day long in the presence of God, her labour of love was so agreeable to Our Lord that He appeared to her and said: "Think of Me and I will think of thee. Think not of thyself nor of other creatures; but only of Me and My service

and praise and love and honour; and lo! I will take care of thee and will protect thee in thy combats, and will charge Myself with thy sanctification."

3. The last condition of manual labour is that it be done for God's glory. How rarely is this condition perfectly fulfilled! "How hard," says Father Le Blanc, "to do things well and not take glory in so doing them! How hard not to seek for some degree of human praise! How difficult to be generous—nay, rather to be just—and give it all to God! Yet He who alone might have gloried in anything that He did, sought not His own glory but His Father's only."

St. Jerome, too, allows that the practice of this purity of intention is difficult. "It is difficult," he says, "to be content in all our actions to have God only as our Judge. It needs a great heart and a lively faith." And yet without this purity of intention we lose the fruit of all our actions. They are as the dust in the balance, valueless, however accurately they may be performed, if not animated by the motive of the glory of God; worse than valueless, if pervaded by that evil principle, a seeking of our own glory. On this subject Father Le Blanc says: "The intention is like the moral form of the action, which gives it worth and merit. Exterior works without a noble and holy intention are like a dead body, a mere use-

less skeleton. When a good intention is superadded, it gives life to this skeleton and restores to it flesh, skin, colour, and motion, like that Divine Spirit whereof Ezechiel speaks. A right intention is the philosopher's stone, which changes everything into gold; it is a sacred magnet which draws the heart of God to ours and incorporates it therewith.

"The glorious Virgin Mary never preached, nor governed, nor heard confessions, nor performed any very distinguished functions. She swept the house, prepared the dinner, laid the cloth, washed the dishes, cleaned the cooking utensils, mended the clothes and the house linen, and discharged all the other duties of her little home. Yet no one doubts but that these her trifling actions were of incomparably higher merit than the lectures of doctors, the preaching of apostles, the government of kingdoms, and all that the vanity of this world adores. What caused this marvel? The purity of her love of God and the excellence of her intention."

It has been said: "It is not the suffering but the cause that makes the martyr." In like manner, it is not the exterior action whose brilliancy darts upwards even to the throne of God, but the affection of a disinterested heart, that seeks only the glory of its Lord and the execution of His Will. Hence St. Augustin's remark; "Men look at the work a man does;

but be you attentive to the design and intention with which he does it."

We may not unfitly conclude with a passage from Cassian (*Instit.* lib. iv. cc. 19, 20), which shows us the spirit in which the lowliest offices of religion were discharged by the monks of early times: "Those who have completed their weekly office," he says, "consign to those who succeed them the utensils and vessels used in their service, which these receive with the greatest solicitude and keep with the utmost care, lest any of them should be lost or destroyed; believing that for the least of these vessels, even as though they were sacred, they will have to give an account, not merely to the Brother who dispenses them, but even to the Lord, if perchance anything should through their negligence be injured. . . . . For they believe, not only that they themselves are not their own, but also that all that they have is consecrated to the Lord. Therefore with such faith do they use and take care of all things, even of those which are contemptible and which may be reckoned vile and of little consequence, that, if they so much as put them in their places, or arrange them more neatly, if they fill a pitcher with water or give any one to drink out of it, if they remove a little dust from the oratory or the cells, they believe with a firm confidence that for each of these trifling services they shall receive a reward from their Lord."

CHAPTER VIII

STUDY AND TEACHING

IN our last instruction we agreed that labour of some kind was actually necessary to religious life; and we saw in what light manual labour was regarded by the Saints. But, besides the actual work of our hands, other work, such as teaching and study, must also be included under the head of labour; and, considering how large a portion of our own time is given to occupations of this kind, it is certainly important for us often to meditate how these duties can be well done and made spiritual actions. In themselves they are not spiritual, any more than working in the kitchen or washhouse would be spiritual, if done without a spiritual intention. Nay, more than this; it is quite certain that intellectual labour in itself is more likely to become unspiritual than manual labour, because it is more absorbing to the mind and engages the thoughts almost necessarily upon itself; because we are more likely to become attached to it; because it lays our mind open to attacks of vanity and inter-

rupts the silence of our soul. Hence Abbot de Rancé has thought it necessary to devote a long chapter in his treatise on Monastic Perfection to answering those who wished to substitute study for manual labour and to the defence of the principle that manual labour is more beneficial than study to a religious man; that it harmonises better with his state and is more akin to humility, silence, and mortification.

We need not, however, on this account infer that learning and teaching cannot be made spiritual when followed in their proper order. In fact, probably the safest of all principles is to be quite sure that no occupation and no way of life need ever be distracting or dangerous if it is followed in the way of duty. "There is no state in which a man is so free from temptation," says St. Vincent of Paul, "as that in which God has placed him. If he be not safe there, he will be safe nowhere." And as this office of teaching is evidently one of our ordinary religious duties, it only remains for us to see how it can be made safe and profitable to our souls.

First, as to study, St. Vincent Ferrer has said everything in a few pages of his *Treatise on the Spiritual Life*, when he reminds us always to season it with prayer. He would have us, when we study, form the habit of breaking off every now and then, in order gently and for a moment

to raise our hearts to God. "Many words are not necessary," he says; "it is enough for some in their simplicity to hide themselves in the clefts of the rock." The reply made by St. Bonaventure when asked from what books he had derived all his knowledge is well known. He answered by pointing to the Crucifix. Perhaps, however, one may venture to doubt whether the full force and significance of the reply is always understood. It is certain that St. Bonaventure was an eminently learned man, and that he studied and read as well as meditated. When then he said that he had learnt all from the Crucifix, he evidently meant that it was studying with Christ in his heart and Christ before his eyes that earned him the fruits of study. It was this continual "taking refuge in the holes of the rock," *i.e.* the Wounds of Christ, that made study profitable to him. In the same spirit St. Augustin says: "Let all who would instruct others first learn to pray, and, before they utter a single word, they should in their heart fervently implore an abundant infusion of Divine grace."

The following passage from a very different source will perhaps be of service to some whom duty may engage in study as a distinct occupation. "There are several simple tests by which you may always know whether any internal disorder has crept into your soul out of these

occupations. 1. If you find a hankering after it when duty puts you to other things. 2. If you have a restless desire to get to it again. 3. If you find it interfering with your spiritual and interior exercises (as *e.g.* making you unpunctual, doing it at wrong times or preoccupying your thoughts in choir during Office or Meditation). If not, all is safe. I need scarcely add that your pen will be spiritualised, purer, more efficacious, and even more luminous, in proportion as you mingle prayer with study." (*Letter of Bishop Ullathorne.*)

Intellectual work, apart from the action of the heart, has some effects quite peculiar to itself. It dries up the soul. Just think what the result of a life of letter-writing is, in which one's head is wearied and worn out and one's heart has nothing to do. Invariably, even when quite innocently pursued, it produces a certain degree of aridity. Mental fatigue always results in dryness. This is why inexperienced people who begin to meditate with their heads only and make their heads do all the work, find they cannot pray. On the other hand, we may take it as an axiom, that the action of the heart never tires or wears one out. Therefore the grand secret is to find out how we may make our head-work into heart-work. And of course this is best done by the exercise of a pure intention. If we give our mental work to God as an offering of love, the heart will

have its share. And then, as St. Augustin beautifully says: "Labour will be without pain, because the labours of those who love are not overwhelming but rather delightful; for pain suffered for an object beloved is either not felt, or, if felt, it loses its nature and is turned by love into joy."

In a little book drawn up for the use of the Ursuline Novices we find one or two useful rules on the spirit in which we should set about the work of teaching, which we will arrange in the form of maxims, adding one or two spiritual advices from other sources.

1. Always remember that of yourselves you can do nothing. It is only by strict and intimate union with God that your work will have its fruit. Remember the words of Jesus Christ, "Abide in Me. . . As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (*St. John* xv. 4).

2. Remember it is not you who do the work, but the Community. "All the members of the body," says St. Paul, "whereas they are many, yet are one body" (1 *Cor.* xii. 12). Let there be no private spirit therefore, no emulation, no desire to excel or to shine, or to be distinguished above others.

3. Penetrate your soul with a sense of your own nothingness. It is the disposition best calculated to draw down God's blessing on your

work. "God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble" (*St. James* iv. 6). And St. Bernard says: "The words of those who instruct others are effectual only in so far as they breathe the spirit of Divine charity."

4. Always go to this sort of work with the intention of discharging it for God's glory and not your own. "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give glory" (*Ps.* cix. 9). If you do this, your hours in school will be as profitable to your soul as your hours before the altar.

5. Cherish a high and spiritual idea of this duty. Remember what St. Denis says: "Among all divine things there is nothing so divine as to co-operate with God in the salvation of souls."

6. Cast away all human views, all human principles, and human motives. Do all in God and for God. You are like a moon, shining only by borrowed light. If your sun is eclipsed, all your light is gone, for you have none of your own. Your wisdom, your light is in proportion to your union with God. St. Augustin says that, if the angels themselves were distracted for a moment from the vision of God, they would be plunged in darkness. What then would be the light in your soul, if not fed from the source of light?

7. and lastly. Remember in the words of St. Denis that "those who teach others should be

holy if they would make others holy; perfect, to perfect others; enlightened, that they may enlighten others." A very holy nun once wrote to her daughters: "Religious who instruct children should themselves be images of the sanctity of God and mirrors of His perfection." It is necessary to have practised for a long time what we wish to teach to others," says St. Vincent; "by this means the word of God, when it proceeds from our mouth, will produce the hundredfold."

Perhaps we may add that attention to one of our own ordinary community rules would help as much as anything to the maintenance of the right spirit in these things, that is the Visit to the Blessed Sacrament before and after going to the school. It is probably one of the actions which, if we examine ourselves, we shall find is most often performed negligently and as a matter of form. We are in a hurry. To have to go into the choir interrupts us in our little fit of precipitation; we go in in a hasty, slovenly way, and come out in the same manner; at least, this is a very possible kind of negligence into which we may fall. Certainly, if we took pains to infuse into this act as much recollection, deliberation, and actual intention as we possibly could, it could not fail to produce an immense result on our interior spirit.

There is a passage in St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians which describes, in what

reads like a beautiful sort of paradox, the secret which holy souls learn of living in positions dangerous to sanctity without being injured. "The time is short," he says; "it remaineth that they also who have wives be as if they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as if they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as if they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away" (1 *Cor.* vii. 29, 30, 31). The Apostle in these words means of course to paint that disengagement of heart from earthly ties and worldly duties which makes "all things pass." May not we in like manner say that our part is to study as though we studied not, and to teach as though we were not teachers? That is to say, neither study nor teaching must be our life.

Our soul must flow into our work only so far as to animate it for God. Our selves must never be poured out on it and wasted. We must learn to look on our brains precisely as we look on our hands, our fingers, our money, or our time; as instruments to be used for God's service, but neither to be taken pleasure in for their own excellence nor used in any way for self. To separate oneself from a love of one's own natural powers and yet to continue to use them is a difficult but most necessary kind of detachment. In it there lies

a very large amount of what we call freedom of soul. No man is more free in heart than he who has learnt indifference to his own intellect. And we shall grow indifferent if we really regard it as being merely a tool or an organ, good if used for God; in all other respects, useless.

It is very needful that we should often remind ourselves of the wide distinction which exists between learning acquired by study and that interior light which is the gift of the Holy Ghost. "A man may be always reading," says Surin, "and yet be wholly destitute of this interior illumination. For true spiritual wisdom does not consist in reasoning and learning gathered out of books; no human study can teach it; it is a pure gift of grace enlightening that soul which is prepared by humility." Elsewhere he speaks of the way in which worldly men set about solving a difficulty by argument, submitting their decision to the rules of human prudence. "What folly is this prudence!" he exclaims. "Do what we will, the result will only be human. The light which God sends into a soul comes, not by reason, but by prayer." He adds four ways by which he says we may dispose ourselves to receive this precious light.

1. To distrust extremely our own natural lights and often to invoke the true light of the Holy Ghost.

2. To form more and more a habit of the presence of God.

3. To mortify the exterior senses.

4. In prayer, to use the affections rather than the understanding.

"Many," he says, "reckon their progress in prayer by the multitude of their reflections; but it is more efficacious to let our will be inflamed with love. For love kindles the intelligence also." He relates how he once entered the library at Louvain with a certain great prelate, who, looking at the vast collection of books, observed: "Here are plenty of books; but one gleam of God's light is worth them all!" And he remarks that those who are accustomed to seek God in prayer find that this light extends to all the powers of their soul, so that, as a matter of fact, they really do attain to greater perfection, even in mere human science, than can be gained in other ways. The mind becomes luminous and is rendered capable of comprehending what otherwise it could not seize.

No one ever saw more closely or expressed more forcibly the vanity of mere human cleverness in dealing with souls than St. Vincent of Paul. "Neither philosophy, nor theology, nor all the reasoning in the world," he says, "will have any effect on souls. Jesus Christ must act with us and we with Him. We must speak as He spoke, and must be united to Him as

He was to His Father. After all, the most ignorant of the devils knows more than the most profound theologian. Mere study relaxes spiritual fervour. It is, therefore, most necessary that those who study should take care to preserve their devotion by means of pious exercises, so that their understanding may be entirely perfected by the knowledge of truth."

The Saint was, moreover, accustomed to check his companions when they praised any one for his learning or abilities, or seemed to think such a person likely to be useful to the Order merely on that account. "Never expect great things from any one," he would say, "who does not know how to converse familiarly with God? Those only are fit to execute the designs of God who have a sincere contempt for themselves." In fact, he abhorred the human notion of clever people being necessary to advance God's works. "God has no need of learned men for the success of His works," he once said; "He more frequently chooses for His instruments simple, unlettered souls like the Apostles."

The same great Saint often warned his children against being discouraged by the stupidity of those with whom they had to deal. This bearing with the grossness of the poor was, he said, one of the chief parts of charity. "If we regard the exterior or the mental abilities of some poor peasants," he would say, "we shall

find them so gross and earthly that they hardly seem to have the gift of reason. But look on them with the light of faith and you will see in them the representatives of God." This warning is one which we should often recall to mind, assuring ourselves that impatience with the dullness of others is rather a proof of our own pride than of any superiority of intellect.

Let us conclude with the words of the *Imitation:* "O Truth, my God, make me one with Thee in everlasting love. I am wearied with often reading and hearing many things. In Thee is all that I will or desire. Let all teachers hold their peace; let all creatures be silent in Thy sight. Speak Thou alone to me" (Book i. ch. iii.).

CHAPTER IX

THE SPIRIT OF ACTIVE WORK *

IF the duty of teaching has to be performed in a particular spirit and surrounded by a rampart of prayer in order to render it safe and profitable to our souls, the same may be said of

* Drawn in great part from the teaching of St. Vincent of Paul.

every kind of active work of charity. These works must spring from some more supernatural principle than mere benevolence, in order to harmonise with religious life. They must be performed with an intention more Divine and spiritual than the love of usefulness; and they must be steeped in a spirit altogether different from the human spirit which often prompts the like work in persons of the world.

Undoubtedly the first principle which moves religious men and women to work and suffer for the bodies and souls of others is the personal love of Him who has chosen the poor for His representatives. We may boldly say that, were there no Incarnation and no Passion, there would be no religious. It is Jesus Christ crucified and the memory of Him that has created the religious life; and in an especial way it is the love of Him which has made religious leave the desert, which is their natural home, to seek Him in schools and hospitals, in prisons, and streets, and garrets, wherever poverty and suffering, ignominy and contempt are reproducing, all over the world, pictures of the ignominies and sufferings of Jesus.

A religious must, therefore, have something of this love in her heart to enable her to undertake any active work in the religious spirit. As far as possible she must get rid of any notion that she is a hospital-nurse or a schoolmistress; and she must work only because, as the spouse

of Jesus, He calls her in His love to minister to Him.

But, besides this, which is evidently the foundation-stone of religious active work, it is very necessary for us to gain spiritual and supernatural views of the right way in which all work must be undertaken. Perhaps no one can be a safer guide on this subject than St. Vincent of Paul, pre-eminently the saint and apostle of active charity, whose life is less marvellous for the miracles which he performed in the way of charitable work than for the altogether superhuman spirit in which he always laboured.

Now throughout his life there was one idea which he strove by every means to infuse into all whom he trained to works of charity. It was this: that our work is useful or useless exactly in proportion as self is taken out of it and God made to take the place of self. He cared not a straw for great abilities; he repeated again and again that the real grace which makes a soul do great things for God depends, not on natural gifts, but on the completeness with which that soul has been made an instrument of God. "God communicates a particular force and energy to the words and deeds of those who do His Will. He pours His special benediction on the works which they undertake for Him; He accompanies their holy enterprises by His grace; and hence all their actions are a source of edification to those who behold them. Those

whose talents are of an ordinary kind are in general more suitable instruments in the hands of God for procuring the salvation of His people than great geniuses, because they have less confidence in themselves; they recur to God with more humility, and they attribute to Him alone the success of all their labours."

A soul must, therefore, be fitted to become God's instrument. Not every movement of zeal, not every natural capacity, not mere human prudence and knowledge of business, fits us to do God's work, but habitual dependence on Him and the willing withdrawal of our own interests and our own glory. In proportion as we despise and mistrust ourselves, we are capable, and in proportion as we esteem and think much of ourselves, we are incapable of doing God's work. Hence the Saint's beautiful maxim, that " none are fit for the work of God but those who have profound humility and a sincere contempt of themselves."

Now perhaps the first step to acquire this spirit is to get thoroughly out of one's soul the idea that it is I who do this particular work. Were I doing it in the world, it would be my individual work; but in religion, when I renounced my worldly name, I renounced also my worldly individuality. The Community labours and uses me as an instrument; the I is merged in the whole body. And I must seek to love this obscurity and with jealousy to avoid ap-

propriating to myself the smallest particle of glory in the fruit of my labours. "Provided God be glorified, it matters little whether it be by means of this person or that. If He ever grants us the favour of being in heaven, we shall see that under the reign of perfect charity there will be no *mine* and *thine*."

The next thing is, when we set to work, not to trust to natural powers and gifts. This does not mean that we are not to use them, but not to trust to them for success. "When a superior, a preacher, or a professor of learning relies on his own prudence and knowledge," says St. Vincent, "God withdraws from him and permits him to act alone. In such a case, all his attempts will end in nothing." His fine genius, his excellent experience, his powers of influence and command, his eloquence, his education, his advantages of whatever kind will be of no avail. He will have a great failure instead of a great success. "God acts in this way in order to convince him by his own experience that all his talents are nothing without the help of heaven." "Paul planteth and Apollo watereth: but God alone must give the increase" (1 *Cor.* iii. 6). Hence too the Prophet teaches us that the secret of strength is dependence on God's help. "In silence and in hope shall your strength be" (*Isaias* xxx. 15). And St. Vincent says: "The most assured means of succeeding in any enterprise is a total abandonment of oneself to

Divine Providence and an entire dependence on its arrangements." Elsewhere he says: "Those who believe themselves to be the authors of the good they have done, or who flatter themselves with having the least share in the world in it, or who take complacency in such thoughts, lose more than they gain, even when the works on which they are engaged are good and holy."

But not only must we avoid self-complacency in our labours and a direct dependence on our own abilities; there is another phase of nature which the Saint is equally anxious to exclude. He would have our work altogether Divine, and, in order to render it so, he bids us restrain anything like a spirit of eagerness and impetuosity. "When we feel ourselves moved by a vehement desire to perform any important and even holy work, we should defer it till another time and wait till our heart is more tranquil and indifferent, in order that self-love may not sully the purity of our intention." "Nature often desires that things should be done at once and quickly. This we should repress, in order to accustom ourselves to the practice of holy indifference and to leave to God the care of manifesting His Will; being assured that, when God wishes an affair to succeed, delay will not injure it; and that the less industry there is on our part, the more there will be of the wisdom and power of God."

What folly in the language of the world and the sense of the world is there in these words! What! the best way to do a work of charity is not to do it! The best way to overcome a difficulty is to take no pains! The best way to accomplish much is to sit idle! St. Vincent was certainly not the man to be charged with want of industry; and yet so little was it that to which he looked for success that he even dares to speak as though it were more hindrance than help. The less of man, he would have us understand, the more of God.

Another most essential point in religious work is to choose humble ways of working, humble beginnings, a want of show and of what appeals to mere human esteem. A slow, steady progress is one of the marks of the Spirit of God. His works in general are accomplished by degrees. They have a beginning and a progress. We should not, therefore, attempt everything at once nor give up everything as lost because it promises little at first and requires some pains. Our part is to proceed step by step and to address frequent prayers to God. Real prudence consists in performing our actions in the manner, at the time, and for the end which is most comformable to the Will of God.

Then again, to be discouraged at the crosses and hindrances which are sure to arise in the beginning of any good work is absolute folly.

"All that we suffer in any good work which we have undertaken," says St. Vincent, "merits for us the grace necessary for its success. Undertakings begun in simple, ordinary ways are more favoured by God than those in which we use extraordinary and remarkable means. The works of God generally proceed by very slow degrees. When God employs us in them, we must use the means suggested by the Spirit of Jesus Christ and conformable to the maxims of the gospel, not the maxims of the world. Believe me, three workmen will do more than ten when God puts His hand to the work; and He always does so when He seems to deprive us of human means and places us under the necessity of doing things which are above our strength. When we have done all in our power to ensure the right issue of an affair, we should preserve our tranquillity and peace, whatever may be the result, for the result will be in God's hands alone."

The illusions which creep into charitable labours did not escape the Saint's notice. He repeatedly exposed the mistake of those who seem to be labouring for God's glory and the salvation of souls, when secretly they are labouring for self. "Many good works," he would say, "are undertaken on motives altogether human, concealed under the pretext of zeal for God's glory; but God is not the author of such works and His wisdom will not

crown them with success." Of these human motives the principal are, a desire to attract applause, renown, and the esteem of men, the gratification of our own restless and busy nature, and a certain incapacity to be hidden and, as we deem it, worthless in a community. Self-love covered with a veil of charity often makes us believe we are serving God, when in reality we are seeking only our own gratification. We are flying from the weariness of inaction into the distraction of a busy life. It is of such souls that St. Vincent adds: "Often those who labour for the salvation of others ruin themselves. They go on well when concerned with their own salvation, but neglect their own souls when caring for the souls of others." "That soul only that is guided by the Spirit of God is capable of extraordinary things."

The Saint departed from his usual gentleness when condemning those who sought for renown and human esteem. "O cursed love of display!" he exclaims; "thou art the cause of men pulling down what Jesus Christ built up. There is nothing that will ensure the success of any undertaking but humility and the pure intention of doing it for His glory. It would be better to be bound hand and foot and cast into the fire than to perform good works with the design of pleasing men."

In the same spirit he directs people not to take

too much care to use eloquence, and show off their abilities in the work of teaching and preaching. He preferred a humble and simple style as more likely to draw down God's blessing. And he quotes the example of our Divine Lord, who might have given the sublimest instructions and yet preferred using common and homely parables about a labourer, a vineyard, a woman sweeping her house, a grain of mustard-seed, and the like, to teach us the humility of teaching. "We should retrench everything that is merely brilliant and serves only to attract to ourselves the applause of men. Our discourse will thus be more full of the spirit of Christ; and the heart which makes this sacrifice is most pleasing to Him who delights in humility and simplicity in word and work." "It is not study or eloquence which contribute to the salvation of souls. Simplicity and humility in the teacher are far more powerful instruments for disposing hearts to receive the operations of grace."

Another very obvious essential in works of charity is perseverence in prayer. Indeed in any work which is directed in any way to the conversion of souls this must always be the chief instrument.

St. Vincent adds another means which he says is equally efficacious. "If you have to treat with others on spiritual things," he says, "begin by a conversation with God and a renuncia-

tion of your own judgment, your own views, and your own opinions, that you may be wholly filled with the Holy Ghost, Who alone is our true light."

Perhaps these quotations may be enough to show what was deemed by this great Saint to be the spirit of active work. It is a spirit of entire self-renunciation and most simple dependence on God. It looks on the human means employed as altogether subordinate to the superhuman guidance. It is not only different from, but diametrically opposed to mere human prudence. In this respect it resembles all teaching based on the principles of the gospel. Those Divine principles which contain the whole essence and kernel of religious life are not merely distinct from the maxims of the world; they are their contrary. The gospel is the world turned upside down. If the world says it is good to be rich, the gospel says it is good to be poor. If the world seeks to be thought well of, the gospel teaches us to love contempt. If the world seeks to be wise and prudent, the gospel will have us become fools for Christ. If the world praises a consciousness of power and brilliant abilities, if it admires and fawns upon greatness in every shape, the gospel teaches us to become great by becoming little, nay, to seek our true spiritual life and being in continual self-annihilation.

People often shrink from the severe and

trenchant sayings of the Saints as though they were pious exaggerations; but nothing they have ever said equals the severity of Our Lord and His apostles. We have but to read the Epistles of St. Paul, who repeats again and again that "the world by wisdom knew not God" (1 *Cor.* i. 21); that to confound them in their fancied wisdom God chose, not the mighty, not the noble, but "the foolish things of the world . . . . to confound the wise, and the weak things . . . . to confound the strong; and the base things, and things contemptible," yea, "things that are not, that He might bring to naught things that are" (*Ibid.* 27, 28). "If any man seem to be wise," he says again, "let him become a fool that he may be wise" (*Ibid.* iii. 18). How he glories not in his gifts but his infirmities! How he crushes down all possibility of vain complacency in mighty deeds by those oft-repeated words, "Not of works, that no man may glory" (*Eph.* ii. 9).

In this the Apostle is but the imitator of his Lord, who gave God thanks that He had hidden the secrets of His will "from the wise and prudent" and revealed "them to little ones" (*St. Matt.* xi. 25), and pronounced His eight Beatitudes on all those states and conditions which the world most shrinks from and despises. "The first," He says, "shall be last and the last first" (*St. Matt.* xix. 30). If a man seek to be great, let him become as a child

(*St. Matt.* xviii. 3). And when He was about to perform one of His greatest miracles, the opening the eyes of the blind, we read that the means which He used were the most humbling to the pride of reason. "He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and spread the clay upon his eyes" (*St. John* ix. 6).

It is, therefore, clear that our ideas on the subject of works of charity, whether for the bodies or the souls of others, should be altogether reformed and cleared of the worldly and human taint which infects mere natural motives. We must not grudge time spent apparently in idleness, if the idleness be humbling us and killing our sense of self-importance. In proportion as it does so, it is making us fitter instruments for the work of God. We must not be dissatisfied or discontented if we are never set to any active work for souls, but believe that we do the work by our obedience as much as though we were actually engaged upon it.

In a community some only are chosen to come in contact with the souls of others; and those are chosen who are most filled with the spirit of God that through them that spirit may be breathed out over the hearts of those to whom they minister. A religious in whom self-love is not mortified would be an unfit instrument for any work for others. She would infuse her own spirit, not the spirit of God. On the

other hand, experience daily exhibits what we can only call one of the ordinary miracles of grace. You will find some soul altogether deficient in mental power or advantages of any kind, a lover of silence and retirement, one who seldom comes out before the eyes of others, and who never in any way teaches or directs. Yet, if such a soul be clothed interiorly with certain supernatural qualities, her grace and beauty cannot be hid. Every one is conscious of the influence of such a one; her mere presence is a benediction to the good and a reproof to the irregular; she goes about and virtue seems to flow out of her, for the simple reason that she is full of the spirit of God. Contrast such a soul with one endowed with talents, power, and the gift of words, and see how infinitely inferior is the influence of the one to that of the other; because the power of the one is God's power, and the power of the other is human and nothing more.

In a word, it is emptiness of self which makes us fit to be filled with the power and spirit of Christ and in Him to be made capable of all things. He works in us; but He cannot enter within us to work there whilst we are filled with self. Perhaps the most astonishing thought by which we can bring home this truth to our hearts is the fact that the greatest work ever accomplished on earth was wrought by self-annihilation. Indisputably, no human work,

however great, can be put in comparison with the redemption of the human race. Yet how was it accomplished? St. Paul gives us the answer in those simple and most wonderful words wherein he tells us that the Word made flesh, who wrought our salvation, "emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant" (*Phil.* ii. 7). Who was it who thus "emptied Himself"? Even He "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead corporally" (*Col.* ii. 9). Then, as St. Thomas says, "the world was saved by the humility of God Incarnate." O model of all work for souls! He who would follow in the footsteps of Christ must follow, not only in His labours, His preaching, His thousand ministeries of love, but, far more than all this, in His Divine emptiness; and must believe in his heart that it is when free from the corruption of his own spirit that he will become fit to be a vessel of the Spirit of God.

Let us conclude by one of St. Anthony's modes of teaching, a parable out of the book of nature. When you graft a rosebud upon a wild thorn, to make the graft live and flourish you must cut off every sprout of the wild stock. If you do this, all the sap and fruitfulness will flow into the engrafted bud. But, some day, you will perhaps come to look at your rose-tree and will marvel to see your engrafted shoot withered and dead. What can be the cause? Every bud of the thorn seems to have been

nipped away; it looks like a mere barren stock. Look a little more attentively and you will see that Nature has her subtleties in plants as well as in souls. The poor thorn, finding it hopeless to put forth buds and leaves on the upright stem, has struck a sucker into the earth, which, all unperceived by you, has crept underground for several yards, and then has thrust its head upwards, and is flourishing there as though it were a strong young plant, defying all detection of belonging to its parent stem. Even so, souls which have been subjected to the sharp pruning-knife of spiritual discipline, sometimes fall into a snare of self-love, which finds its vent in secret gratifications, the nature of which they conceal even from themselves. But be sure of this; where self has its vent, no matter in how hidden a shape, the result will be always the same; the spiritual and supernatural work will languish and die. Its life depended on the cutting down of the natural stock; and the free growth of natural tastes, natural motives, and natural reason has been the signal for its destruction.

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CHAPTER X

LITTLE FAULTS AND LITTLE VIRTUES

WE read in the life of St. Francis of Sales that one day, finding some of his household playing at a game, he stopped to watch them, and, observing one who was using some trickery, he severely reproved him, and received as an excuse the explanation that they were only playing for counters.

The Saint replied: "The man who would cheat for a counter would cheat for a crown." The Bishop of Belley, who was with him, ventured to express his surprise at what he thought so rigid an opinion, which gave occasion for the Saint to make a beautiful remark: "I would always," he said, "make more account of little faults than of great ones. Great faults in their own nature inspire horror and it is more easy to avoid them. Moreover, fidelity in little things is a test of love."

If this doctrine be useful to all Christians, it is certainly specially so to religious. Not to speak of the peculiar force with which our own

constitutions warn us against small negligences, "lest by neglecting small things we fall away by little and little," let us hear what some of the Saints have said on this subject.

St. Bernard assures us that the transgression of trifling rules renders the observance of the vows difficult. St. Alphonsus exclaims: "Would to God we knew the importance which the devil attaches to small faults! We should learn then what to think of them ourselves;" and he remarks that, generally speaking, our aridities in prayer and tormenting temptations arise from little infidelities. St. Gertrude acknowledged that one look of curiosity was punished in her own case by sensible aridity for eleven years; and again, that she once saw the devil picking up some little bits of wool she had wasted contrary to poverty and counting the syllables of the Office which she had said carelessly. St. Bonaventure called fidelity "the shortest and easiest perfection;" and St. Teresa used to say that a religious who is faithful to minute rules does not walk but flies to sanctity. One might multiply such sayings of the Saints, as when St. Francis of Sales remarks that "the predestination of religious is attached to the observance of little things;" but all are only developments of the principle given us by Our Lord Himself when He laid down fidelity to few things, to small things, as the rule by which we shall be judged. "*Super pauca fuisti*

fidelis;" "Thou hast been faithful over a few things" (*St. Matt.* xxv. 21), are the words with which the good servant was commended by his Lord. To him they opened the gates of Paradise.

Any one who has ever meditated on the three vows of religion cannot fail to see the force of St. Francis of Sales' principle, that in these essential points little things are of more consequence than great ones. A great fault against any of the vows would shock the mind of any religious, even one habitually tepid or careless. Very few persons could be found who would secretly give or receive presents, conceal anything for their own use, or openly refuse to obey the command of a Superior. It is plain that these gross violations of our vows are not what we are to be on our guard against half so much as minor and more minute infractions of rule. And it is equally clear that fidelity and exactness on very small points which touch the vows keeps the conscience tender, whereas negligence makes it dull and insensible and so renders us liable to fall into great faults almost unawares.

St. Francis of Sales my be taken as the teacher *par excellence* on the danger of little faults and the value of little virtues; we cannot, therefore, do better than transcribe some of his remarks on this subject.

"There are very few occasions," he used to say, "when we are able to gain £1000, but

many when we can lay by pence and farthings. If we are prudent and persevere in our savings, we shall grow rich in time. And so we shall lay up treasure in heaven and attain great spiritual riches if we make the most of small opportunities of pleasing God. Every one, however, likes to have eminent virtues. For the most part, were the choice given us, we should all like to be endowed with fortitude, magnanimity, the grace of martyrdom, the love of suffering, generosity, and the like. How few, comparatively speaking, are the occasions for exercising these virtues! How very often we puff ourselves up with fine thoughts about them and build castles in the air as to how we will exhibit them; and, when the occasion presents itself, our great courage dwindles down and we are glad to hide our heads for very shame! Let us learn to value things less for their exterior brilliancy and more for their interior motive. A trifling action done with much love is of great price. Did not Our Lord Himself speak of eternal reward in exchange for a cup of cold water and deign to praise the widow's two mites? "

" People generally do not make much account of lowly, little virtues, such as a graceful condescension to the tiresome tempers of our neighbours, a cheerful bearing with our imperfections and disadvantages out of a love of our own abjection, the good-humoured putting up

with small acts of selfishness and injustice from others, preference of others to ourselves in trifles, an agreeable manner of answering those who speak disagreeably to us, a pleasant manner of receiving a refusal, gratitude and politeness when others oblige us, kindness to servants, and other similar things. Here are the graces of life and the signs and tokens of interior grace. But no! We want virtue that will win us a great reputation; and all the while that we want to scale mountains, we neglect the little footsteps which will help us to the top."

Another time, looking at a picture of St. Mary Magdalen at the foot of the cross, he exclaimed: "How much we ought to love those little virtues which grow at the foot of the cross and are watered by the Blood of Jesus." "And which are those virtues?" asked his friend. "They are," he replied, "humility, patience, mildness, benignity, bearing with others, condescension, sweetness of manner when proceeding from a motive of charity, cordiality, compassion, simplicity, candour, and the like. They are like violets which blossom in the shade and which have little show but an exquisite odour. Other virtues are doubtless much greater; but we must beware of loving them more, if the reason why we prefer them is at all because they make us more illustrious in our own eyes or those of others. There is less danger to self-love in lowly virtues."

St. Teresa in her instructions to her religious often puts the same truth in a very forcible way. There is a little address of hers preserved, spoken before taking leave of one of the convents she had reformed. She congratulates the religious on the good spirit she observes among them and concludes with these words: "This spirit will continue, my Sisters, if each one gives her whole strength to preserve inviolate the least religious observance. Do not let this weary you; every day will then be full of heroic actions."

It is possibe, however, to discourage and overburden the mind by a multitude of resolutions to avoid every kind of small fault—resolutions which, continually broken, create a feeling that it is impossible to practise such exact perfection, and so result in failure. Fénélon, who says a great deal upon the subject, gives one very simple rule about it; he does not tell us we are to avoid every small fault, but to avoid every fault which we see is a fault before we commit it. "Whenever before doing anything something tells you it is a fault, no matter how trifling, abstain from it. If not, you in a degree resist the spirit of God. Great faults of precipitation or infirmity are comparatively nothing in the injury they do the soul, compared to trifling faults done with deliberation; because then we turn a deaf ear to conscience; we stifle the voice of the

Holy Ghost, Who whispers in our heart; and we do our best to drive Him from us. The great point is to give God what He asks of us. We cannot refuse Him this and remain at peace."

Elsewhere he says: "We ought to consider that what God desires to see in us is suppleness of will. He does not care so much for our actions in themselves as He does for this delicacy of conscience which is the sign of great love. And this suppleness is best detected in fidelity in little things." This fidelity is a thing quite distinct from scrupulosity; it causes the soul no mental labour, no disquietude. It is the fruit of simplicity, the answer to the question: "Will this please or displease God? If it displeases Him, I will not do it, no matter whether it be a trifle or not."

The same writer observes that persons naturally inexact are just those who ought to make exactitude in trifles an inviolable law. "You will say: 'It is a mere nothing;' but remember that *nothings* are *everything* to you. It is a nothing which nevertheless you refuse to God; which, if you refuse it, will do its best to ruin you; which, if you grant it, will be like a wall between you and the relaxation of your spiritual life." "Nothing," he adds, "is so terrible as to resist God interiorly; nothing so truly great as those actions whereby we make ourselves little in presence of the Divine greatness."

We may conclude with a few passages on the same subject from the writings of the Saints. Thus St. Augustin remarks very forcibly: "Never look on little faults as trifles. If they seem of no account when you *weigh* them, they will terrify you when you begin to *count* them."

St. Teresa says: "A living body feels the prick of even a tiny thorn; should not a living soul be sensitive to the prick of a little fault?" St. Basil says: "Each one of our actions, even the most indifferent, either presses us down to earth or raises us nearer to heaven;" and St. Paulinus of Nola puts the same idea more strongly: "All that we do and all that we say belongs either to the narrow way of life or to the broad road of perdition."

St. Francis Xavier in his letters often refers to this subject. "Do not deceive yourself," he says in one of them; "no man ever excelled in great things who did not first excel in trifles;" and again: "I desire that you should form on little things your courage for attempting such as are great."

But it is St. Francis of Sales who has spoken most frequently and most beautifully on the greatness of trifles. "Bees," he says, "go about gathering honey from lilies and roses; but they do not gather less from simple, humble flowers, such as rosemary and thyme. Nay, they even obtain more from the latter than from the former; because these hidden

and lowly blossoms conceal the honey, keeping it fast shut up in their little cups, and thus it is better preserved and more powerful in flavour. So too is it with the faithful soul. The little contemptible occasions which present themselves every hour for the practice of charity and self-denial are not only more frequent but also safer and better than great occasions. There is more humility in them; and so there is more sanctity."

"Oh, what a little thing is required in order to become a Saint!" exclaims St. Vincent of Paul. "We have only to do the Will of God in all things. Who can be more perfect than he who in every little thing seeks only how to please God?" And again: "Not for the wealth of the whole world should we permit ourselves the least thing against God or our conscience. If we wish to acquire the blessed habit of pleasing God in great things, we must begin by pleasing Him in trifles. In trifles more, perhaps, than in what is great; because trifles do not expose us to the danger of vainglory so much as actions of a more excellent nature; trifles, therefore, are all for God."

THE END

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